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The Ritual Play of Power: Pilgrimage and Protest Amongst Contemporary English Druids.

**Paul Davies, Master of Arts by thesis,
Department of Anthropology,
University of Durham.**

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Abstract: Between idea and expression.

Once shrouded in myth and ritual secrecy, modern Druids have stepped into more public arenas and are more accessible than they have ever been. Introducing three of the largest Druid groups in England today, this ethnographic study will explore the various ways in which Druidry is constructed, and through the act of pilgrimage, ritually performed. Projecting folk-lore, myth and history upon places such as Stonehenge, Glastonbury and Iona, this thesis will demonstrate how Druids compete with heritage bodies, archaeologists, and Christian pilgrims, creating a sense of culture through ritual acts that emerge from the space between idea and expression.

With thanks to Simon, Peter and Marion.

Preface. Sketches of self.

In 1989, I travelled from my home in County Durham to a New Age fair in London where I picked-up a leaflet introducing members of the public to the recently re-formed Order of Bards Ovates and Druids. Back in my miner's cottage amid the pit villages and rolling valleys of Durham, I began to study and work with the Order's postal course - the Druidic *Gwers* (Welsh for lessons).

Attending the first pilgrimage of the Order to the island of Iona in May 1989, I performed, with twelve other initiates, ceremonies laced with references to Celtic saints, arch-angels and miscellaneous New-Age Pagan sentiment. While the group of companions invoked these deities in the ceremonial circle, I underwent a group initiation into the Order, although the main purpose of the retreat, the group agreed, served as an opportunity to perform ritual and meet with other members of the Order.

On this first OBOD pilgrimage I met Bill and Chris Worthington, and although they lived close to Pendle Hill in Lancashire and I in Durham, we agreed to meet for a ceremony later in the year. A Spring ritual of the new moon took place the following month in Bill's home-made stone circle. Seeking a group name that would focus our own identity as Druids and the landscape in which we performed ritual, Chris and Bill named the group the Northern Grove. Simultaneously, a group based in East Sussex also constructed a similar circle (of wood) in their garden to accommodate members of their newly-formed Southern Grove. Expressed through monumentality, and seemingly echoing Druidic associations among the Neolithic circles of Stonehenge, Woodhenge and Avebury, we felt synchronicity binding us together as one Order. After two years of celebrating the eight Pagan festivals, the Grove had attracted to it around fifty members. These group meetings helped to forge, from the ideas referred to in the *Gwersu*, a sense that we were a group with our own unique Pagan identity.

Two years later, I left the Northern Grove, moved from Durham to Norfolk where I met Holly, another initiate of OBOD, and together, we formed the Norfolk Grove. Feeling the need to make a ritual connection with the ancestors of the area, Holly and I began to consider, within our ceremonies, the Romano-British tribes people of East Anglia. We decided to call ourselves the Iceni Grove in their honour, and within a year had five regular members from Holt, Norwich and one determined youngster who travelled regularly from Peterborough, along with a number of interested people who would visit our ceremonies as they pleased. At one point, half of the Norwich Moot (a local Pagan group) were regularly attending ceremonies. As a functioning Grove, we performed two initiations and celebrated the eight festivals suggested in the OBOD's *Gwers*, adjusting each ceremony to include the Iceni ancestors. Looking at a map of the region, I drew imaginary boundaries defining the limits of our 'territory' - King's Lynn to Ely to Felixstowe - although these boundaries often shifted as we welcomed the occasional visitor further afield - for example, Cambridge or Durham.

Feeling comfortable with the idea of working with the ancestors of Norfolk, Holly and I never fully discussed why we thought it important to do so. Maybe we were attempting the impossible - to bring the past back to life - or maybe we were re-interpreting the past in some other intuitive way. Perhaps our new-found inspiration, drawn from brief narratives in the *Gwers* referring to Boudicca and her battle against the Roman legions in AD. 61, and the sense of expressing alternative ideas of religion, was more important than the logic required to justify our ritual activities. During our ceremonies, we would read out a role-call of the past Iceni kings from Sommerset-Fry's history of the Iceni (1982). Working ritual with these warrior spirits (their Druids and Kings) created for us all a strong feeling of belonging and our own individual identity within the OBOD.

On several occasions, Holly's favourite archaeological monument, the Bronze Age site of Warham Camp, became our ritual arena, the place where our ceremonies were performed amid the ancestral spirits of the Iceni. Henceforth our relationship with Norfolk reached beyond the time of Rome's occupation and Boudicca's revolt. Holly also introduced the group to his favourite woodland clearing near Gorleston - a gentle hill surrounded by birch trees over-looking the Norfolk Broads - a good site as it remained sheltered from the wind and the public for our private ceremonies. (As a group, we were never interested in performing ceremony in public places such as Stonehenge or Avebury - we only wished to make ritual with Pagans who were interested in our work as Druids.) While Holly took the group into the countryside, I took care of organising the city-based ceremonies, securing an old 17th century church, and later, an old wine cellar, as secluded places to perform our private rites. Through ritual and pilgrimage to sites deemed to be blessed by the presence of the ancestors, I sensed that the city of Norwich, and the woodlands and monuments of Norfolk were our own ceremonial playground.

I recall writing a letter to Chris and Bill in Lancashire informing them of the Grove's progress, and of my idea of working ceremony to accommodate the spirits of Celtic Iceni. Chris replied, stating that around the same time as our Grove took the name Iceni, the Northern Grove had begun to incorporate into rituals their own Celtic ancestors, calling themselves the Brigante Grove after the Romano-British tribes-people of the North. Again, we felt a synchronicity at work, a phenomenon we attributed to the spirit of Druidry. Following this trend, several newly emerging Groves of the Order also began to ritually work with the warrior spirits of the Celtic people, naming their Groves after these tribal ancestors. Men made shields, carried swords; women draped themselves in colourful ceremonial robes reflecting the styles of the era, while others preferred the white Druidic robes described by Pliny and Caesar. Hence, a number of men and women attracted to OBOD had, or soon developed, an interest in battle re-enactment groups. The dress, the robes, and the ritual tools, all seemed to fit together very nicely as ideas of identity were colourfully performed in ritual. Back in Lancashire, beneath the shadows of Pendle Hill, the Grove of the Brigante went from strength to strength as their numbers continued to grow until Bill and Chris relocated further Northwards, and the Brigante ceased to meet, only to re-form at a later date (chapter 3).

As I have shown above, a popular Druidic past-time involves initiates moving into a local landscape in order to make ceremony. Rather than invoking the spirit of a place within artificially created circles (St. Columba on Iona, Boudicca in Norfolk, or the Brigantian Warriors in Lancashire), journeys made to hill tops, woodland groves or hill forts, are all perceived as a response to the spirit of the place - the land as deity calling her priests to respond to Her, rather than Druids simply invoking her presence in a ritual circle. Five years after the first pilgrims were 'called' to Iona, Philip and Stephanie Carr-Gomm responded to a feeling within the Order that a retreat should be held away from a hotel - an idea I remember being aired at the first retreats held on Iona. In 1994, ten days of camping were held in an initiate's field in the Vale of the White Horse, Oxfordshire (complete with hippies, tipis and Volkswagen campers). Five years after attending these Uffington retreats I returned to Durham (and the same miner's cottage) to live and to study, more critically, the ritual journeys of this Druid group. In May 1999 I returned for a third visit to Iona, as an academic.

The arenas of major pilgrimage seemed not to have changed (with the notable addition of Glastonbury), although the structure of ceremony had. The hotel room where I received initiation in 1989 remained consistent, yet the ceremonies had lost their references to Celtic Christianity, adopting in their place Pagan references to animal spirits. Here, I met nine initiates, all unfamiliar to me, two of whom I later visited for ceremony (in their garden's stone circle). The Order has now moved beyond the rituals of Paganised Christianity, and the popular destination of OBOD pilgrims is no longer the long, and expensive, journey to a hotel on Iona, but a camping site in the English countryside.

Again, I visited, as an academic, the hippies and tipis at Uffington in the Vale of the White Horse, now the most popular of the OBOD's retreats, where I met again several initiates I had first encountered during a retreat I attended in Glastonbury, in February 1998 as an undergraduate. Here I also met for the first time a Druid named Idris from Yorkshire, along with Theresa from Lancashire. Unbeknown to me, they had decided to re-start the Brigante Grove. After an invitation to travel Northwards for their first ceremony, I attended, in the following December, their first Winter solstice ritual of this re-formed Grove.

My life seemed to have come full circle. Living, as I had twelve years ago, in Durham, I found myself travelling south for similar solstice ceremonies with a very different Brigante Grove (see chapter 3). But things also seemed to have shifted on an inner-level as well. In my time away from the Order, I had found higher education and a questioning mind. This served me well during interviews and ceremonies, and allowed me to think more clearly about the political nature of the ritual journeys that I was now making.

I felt I had, in some way, returned to the political radicalism of my teenage youth for, as a religion with its focus and reverence within nature, it was this concern for the plight of the Earth that first

drew me toward Paganism. During my exploration of Druidic ceremony, I felt as though ecological politics had been acknowledged, yet also compromised and reduced to implicit symbolisms within ceremony. For example, political action against pollution had been replaced with visualising a white healing light around the planet, and campaigns against deforestation by forging relationships with trees and imaginary animal spirits. Hence, throughout my fieldwork, I searched for the political experience of pilgrimage to prove an academic thesis - that Druidic pilgrimage is the political assertion, and the empowering, of ones own self, representing a sense that, for Druid pilgrims, culture emerges through the phenomenon of ritually journeying into landscapes that contain the narratives of text such as the *Gwers*. On a more personal level, I wanted to prove to myself that the political denials of many Druids (a common topic of conversation among many initiates) are denials of their own socio-religious power. In short, pilgrimage can become as dis-empowering through its denial of self as much as it reinforces a sense of culture. Hence my research, qualified through my privileged position as both academic and Druid, reveal the ways through which political paradigms may complement the ritual processes of Druidry.

By engaging in ethnographic research, as insider Druid with ritual history and as anthropologist, I find myself perpetually balancing the literary scales between representing Druids as subjects, and myself as the focus of research. Hence the balance of judgement, and the insights permitted through such a viewpoint, reach beyond paradigms of emic and etic perspectives, serving as autobiographical signatures at the end of each paragraph. Rather than a narrative authoritatively draped in objectivity, this discourse is reflexive, for without the self in text, the ethnography would be a falsehood (Geertz 1988: 1-24). Rather than deny and bury the experience, and any anxiety developing as a result of such study, it should be realised and fully revealed as somehow meaningful to author and the anthropological record – as both pilgrim and cultural cartographer (see chapter 6: 72 of this thesis).¹ Rather than search for the pilgrim's un-articulated (and often indefinable) understanding of spiritual belief and the ritual self (Stringer 1990), the construction of identity and its ritual components are, through the experience of the ethnographic self in its location, reflexively known (ibid: 85-87). For Georges Gusdorf, the process of ethnography is a matter of searching beyond empirical evidence toward a total (and artistic) understanding of meta-narratives.

Recourse to history and anthropology allows one to locate autobiography in its cultural moment... the total portrait is to be found on the horizon of all the different visages, of which [its totality] would be, in a sense, the common denominator' (Gusdorf 1980: 35).

Gusdorf's common denominator is the author, who through descriptive, interpretative, and theoretical understandings of subject, offer meanings that are inclusive of the self. The

¹ Ethical considerations concerning the presentation of subjects and associated subject material prevented me from documenting all aspects of my ethnography. Apart from Chiefs, and other leading Druids, all names of my informants have been changed.

anthropologist not only designs and paints a portrait, they are also an integral part of the frame. Hence, the social context of this thesis, written by an author with a history of involvement in Druidry, is auto-anthropology (Jackson 1987: 17, Hastrup 1995: 152), and supports the work of other academics seeking to understand, more fully, their social/academic/Pagan selves, and their subjects of study - the newly emerging neo-Pagan communities in Britain today (Wallis 2000: 252-56 on auto-archaeology, and Wallis and Blane 2000: 395 on the Pagan self within ethnography).

During the course of my research I requested, and received, permission to attend the meetings of the Council of British Druid Orders, thus permitting a comparative study of the ritual processes of COBDO and OBOD. First I will introduce the reader to, and explore in more detail, the beginnings of modern Druidry and the political identities of these Druid groups prior to the formation of the OBOD in 1964.

Introduction. The Druids: from past to present.

Recounting periods of participant observation at Druid pilgrimages, along with meetings with different individuals and groups around the country (appendices 1 and 2), this thesis will examine and discuss the ritual processes of Druid Orders such as the OBOD, the British Druid Order, and the Council of British Druid Orders - their use of myth, text and the processual development of these groups toward pilgrimage as a tool of self-definition. I will show how the development of pilgrimage, as a political agenda rooted within textual forms, serves to challenge the social mainstream, assisting more fully in the emergence of English Druidry from its linguistically exclusive past. Druid pilgrims have recently become very visible in the social landscape of Britain (Stonehenge and Seahenge), as ritual journeys into these 'sacred realms' become the ultimate expression of an alternative belief system to Christianity and the interpretations of landscapes by heritage bodies presiding over these places.

Today, modern Druids comprise three distinct groups. The first two groups belong to a system of thought and activity I have named the 'closed school of Druidry' due to rules governing the admittance of individuals seeking initiation. The third group (the focus of my research), I have called the 'open school'. Discussing the growth of Druidry from its fraternal/linguistic beginnings, I will first examine the closed school of Druidry, and the roots from which the open schools grew.

In *The Book of Druidry* (1992: 114-118), Ross Nichols describes several Druid groups having, as their focus, ritual sentiments that can be thought of as local or nationalist. They include the Welsh Gorsedd (formed in 1792) and the Cornish-based Bards of Cernow (founded 1928). Seeking to promote a sense of independence from mainstream government, these groups understand individual identity and their collective culture to reside in their local landscapes and languages as 'traditions that have always existed'. Expressions of autonomy are perhaps most noticeable through the promotion of their own, non-English languages. In *Listening People, Speaking Earth* (1997) Graham Harvey notices a similar pattern of self-assertiveness among French Orders attempting to retain a sense of individuality amid political collectivisation:

Druids remained powerfully emotive figures for cultural and linguistic traditions, especially those threatened by dominant and hostile foreign powers. They were recruited into movements aimed at strengthening cultural and national identities, particularly in Brittany and Wales... For some, Druids inspired revolutionary zeal against English or French cultural, administrative and religious control (ibid: 18).

Throughout the annually held Welsh Gorsedd's Eisteddfod, Welsh speakers compete for poetic, artistic and literary prizes. Such expressions of self-determinism compare well with the ceremonial practices of the Bards of Cernow. Rituals using the Cornish language, revived in 1928 (Nichols 1992), are held in Cornish churches or other secretive locations. A number of years ago, while

attending a Bardic church service near Penzance, a Cornish Bard informed me that close links with the Welsh Gorsedd were maintained. She referred to a Druid prayer written by the scholarly Iolo Morganwg, an active force in Welsh nationalism in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The Cornish language is, the Bard informed me, a cross between the Breton and Welsh dialects. Strangely, this Cornish ceremony was advertised in a local tourist column, yet attending this service seemed to me an expression of local identity for local Cornishmen and women rather than a church service available for tourists. I couldn't understand a word, but quickly understood the symbolism of the performance. Harvey comments upon the connections between Druidry, the poetics of the nationally loyal Bard and the church:

Welsh, Cornish, Breton and other Celtic cultural Druidries could stress the Bardic arts without compromising the predominant Christianity of their members. Most [modern] Druids until recently have in fact been good Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists or whatever form of Christianity was most culturally vibrant in any particular area. In some areas today, Druidry is largely cultural and not religious, let alone Pagan (ibid).

Amy Hale agrees and, by emphasising the distinctions between the esoteric neo-Pagan movement and the Cornish Gorsedd, clearly demonstrates the complexities that exist today among groups with a penchant for Bardism.

'The Cornish Gorsedd is not', Hale stresses, 'a Neo-Pagan organisation. It never has been. In fact, the ceremony is, in essence, quite Christian (Hale 2000: 182)... They have different ritual foci (one religious and one, in theory, secular), and for the most part different constituencies. The uncomfortable coexistence of the two groups indicates a great deal about the multi-faceted nature of Celticity' (ibid: 197).

Many Druids of the open school claim that the closed schools of English Druidry comprise fraternally focused groups, with an open attitude to Christianity. My own (brief) ceremonial encounters with two groups of the closed school, at public meetings held at Primrose Hill in London, certainly bear testimony to this claim of a male bias. Ross Nichols (1992) briefly documents some of these, including the Ancient Druid Order formed in 1717 by John Toland (the seed group of modern Druidry), and the splinter group, the Most Ancient Order of Druids, formed in 1781 to promote God, Queen, and the mysteries of the Druidic oak. In 1833 The United Ancient Order of Druids separated from the Ancient Order of Druids, operating as a charitable fraternity with lodges in Australia and America (ibid: 103).² The Welsh, Cornish and Breton groups veil their inner-ceremonies in linguistic exclusivity, while the closed schools of the English exclude through ritual secrecy.³ Yet the English groups seem to focus their activities through maintaining a ritual

² There are numerous other groups.

³ Although Welsh and Cornish groups perform rituals in public places, initiation into one (unnamed) English Order of the closed school requires the initiate to swear ritual vows of secrecy, and analysis and a

relationship with an imagined Druidic past, within which English society has its roots firmly set. It is these same identities from which the Welsh and Cornish seek independence.

Apart from fragments of ADO rituals taken by Nichols and placed into the OBOD ceremonies, or the occasional prayer written by Iolo Morganwyg, only exclusivity unites these disparate groups, as initiation into them is largely dependent upon a command of the appropriate language, or in the case of the English groups, requires initiates to be male. Hence for most people in England and Wales, and all women in England, these groups remain closed and inaccessible.⁴ Access to these groups is difficult, and when access is granted, ritual vows of secrecy ensure that knowledge is contained within the membership, although it is true to state that these groups serve both a social and esoteric purpose. Socially, individuals assist each other in obtaining employment, or promoting ideas that support a social hierarchy. Individuals from these groups therefore reflect these concerns and the groups may, for example, attend war memorial services, or local street parades. Members tend to be older than the modern New Age Pagan individuals of the open school who, privately, prefer to have their social visions fixed within political alternatives to war or Christianity. These group members therefore tend to be younger, more dissident or generally disillusioned with mainstream society. The 1960s symbolised a period when social movements and alternative ideals, developing amid the music, fashion and psychadelia of the time, encouraged new ways of thinking at both social and spiritual levels. It was at this time that the OBOD emerged as an alternative to the closed schools. In 1964, the Ancient Druid Order experienced internal anxieties during the election of a new Chief Druid, and after narrowly losing a vote to become the next Chosen Chief, Ross Nichols formed the separatist Order of Bards Ovates and Druids. A marked shift in modern Druidry then occurred as nature replaced nationalism as the focus for ritual activity. Nichols took notes and teachings written by past Chief Druids of the ADO, appropriating these past leaders as the OBOD's ancestral leaders (Nichols 1992: 99).

Today, initiates of the OBOD credit Nichols for being the catalyst for re-introducing the full cycle of eight seasonal ceremonies into modern Paganism, as well as lifting the veils of secrecy surrounding modern Druidry. But it was OBOD's present Chief Druid Philip Carr-Gomm who, after the death of Nichols in 1975, collected together papers belonging to Nichols in order to present Druidry as a mail order catalogue.

As a result of this action, individuals interested in Druidry were no longer required to be collectively present at a meeting, as the focus for ritual activity switched from gatherings in Masonic-style arenas held in church halls toward a more private form of contemplation at home, or ritual expression in the countryside. These *Gwersu* take the form of a postal course permitting

discussion of this group remains difficult. However, one may snatch fragments from Druidic texts, and by also speaking with long-established members.

⁴ There are occasional exceptions, such as the fraternal Orders of England giving the occasional Grove to women only.

thousands more people access to the esoteric teachings of three grades of Bard, Ovate and Druid. Encouraging ritual journeys into the inner (visualised) realities, and physical pilgrimages into nature (considered a deity), Druidry today reaches out for people as its members reach out for landscapes. Thus the split from the Ancient Druid Order served as a catalyst for a seismic change in ritual processes and gender politics, allowing the Druidry of OBOD to move away from its once fraternal form, toward paradigms based upon the idea of a maternal deity more Pagan in nature than had been previously expressed within the Christian/Pagan groups.

The sudden availability of Druidry in a textual form encourage men and women to perform self-initiations and consider a political empathy with groups championing the ecological protection of the Druid's Goddess. Linking politics of the Green Left with esoteric ritual, Druidry became critical of society's treatment of nature through its association with the radical activists of popular eco-groups. *Gwers* 11 gives the postal addresses of Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace. However, political sentiment remains mostly symbolic as the individuals' performance of the *Gwersu* serve the required purpose of the OBOD's Druidry - the re-discovery of the inner-spiritual self through meditation, and the unity of this self with an external deity located in nature. The OBOD has not developed a serious radical base from which mainstream society is challenged, as any socio-religious sentiment/dissidence is lost within ceremonial activity. Hence, any political resonance within the social mainstream remains general and implicit. It is therefore true to state that the structure of the OBOD simply encourages initiates to consider nature, and does not promote social dissent.

With the death of Ross Nichols and the re-emergence of the OBOD under the leadership of Philip Carr-Gomm, other Druid groups formed to express their own definitive ideas of Druidry. 1979 saw the formation of the British Druid Order by Philip Shallcrass - a group expressing a nature-based Paganism alternative to the OBOD's mixture of Paganised Christianity.⁵ In 1993, Dylan ap Ithinn brought into the Druidic fold a group of people he had met while running a tattoo shop in Portsmouth - brightly tattooed individuals - naming the group the Insular Order of Druids. Rolo Maughfling led the Glastonbury Order of Druids and, alongside Dylan and leaders of various groups, worked within the collective of the Council of British Druid Orders, promoting Druidry and the interests of Druids at Stonehenge (also chapter five). In 1998 in Kingston, London, John Timothy Rothwell was crowned King Arthur Pendragon, co-ordinating a political campaign of ritual protest on behalf of Druid groups and the planet Earth. Arthur's Druid group, the Loyal Arthurian War Band, physically contested the activities of land developers including, among the targets of their non-violent protests, the authority of Heritage bodies in guardianship of pre-historic sites such as Stonehenge and Seahenge (see later chapters). Arthur went on to chair the Council of British Druid Orders.

⁵ Throughout the 1960s until 1990, OBOD ceremonies invoked Christian archangels and saints. Under the leadership of Philip Carr-Gomm, this group has recently broken away from their Christian bias, perhaps the last remnants of the closed, fraternal schools.

Druidry has now, within 30 years, diversified from its fraternal/linguistic/Christian beginnings toward a Goddess-focused Paganism culminating in the ritual-radicalism of King Arthur Pendragon. My involvement with Druidry over the last ten years has revealed many smaller groups loosely bound together by general beliefs that are passionately promoted and imaginatively performed through ritual journeys expressive of a cultural need. Through pilgrimage, an imagined past is brought into the present, projected upon landscapes, and used to effect social change, whether the political intent of pilgrimage is implied in text and ceremony, or forcefully asserted as ritual protest. Hence, the growth of modern Druidry can be mapped as a processual development from the secretive beginnings of the ADO in 1717 through to the political visionary, Arthur Pendragon. Below, I will explore in more detail the historical and mythic roots that today inspire Druids to make pilgrimage into landscapes they consider to be sacred.

Chapter 1. Re-interpreting the past: the ritual text.

‘[Druids] have images of immense size, the limbs, interwoven with twigs, they fill with living men, and the same being set on fire, the men, surrounded by the flames, are put to death’ Caesar on the sacrifice to the Wicker Man (Matthews 1997: 16).

‘Clad in a white robe, the priest ascends the tree and cuts the mistletoe with a golden sickle, and it is received by others in a white cloak’ Pliny on the Druidic ritual of the oak and mistletoe (ibid: 21).

Druidry exists within the space between text and expression. New Age publications provide text for the reader, and pilgrimage becomes the ultimate expression of these ideas creating, for the Druid, a true sense of culture. The ritual performance, that is the pilgrims use of Welsh and Irish Gaelic, ritual song, invocations and other ceremonial forms at places made or considered sacred (chapter 6), can be understood to express theologies that are drawn and developed from textual myth and history.

As an initiate, I was inspired to explore further the Celtic world through the art of George Bain (1973), and the Irish Book of Kells (9th century), although the use of Welsh and Irish Gaelic in Druid ceremony also assists in the re-construction of a Celtic identity (see below). A variety of well-known writings on an indigenous Celtic past (Green 1993, 1996), the contemporary Celt (Bowman 1995) and the modern myths of Paganism (Hutton 1991, 1996) permit the neo-Celt to re-consider and formulate identity in the present. Drawing upon ideas of cultures preceding the ancient Celts - the Neolithic temple builders or proto-Celts (Philip Carr-Gomm pers comm., Arthur Pendragon Chapter 4) - the past is imaginatively emplaced within a contemporary frame and ceremonies are performed in places often associated with the prehistoric. Here the eight festivals of the year, promoted by Ross Nichols (1992) of the OBOD are performed, creating a sense of newly emerging communities that are implicit, negotiated, meaningful and embedded in the present

This chapter will examine how initiates draw upon these mythic-histories that serve to sustain the growth of Druid groups, and how a sense of culture emerges, through expression, from identities that are rooted within text.

The space between literature and expression allows the imagination to invent ideas that support a cultural ideal. Hobsbawm and Ranger named the process of the imagining self 'the invention of tradition' (1984), and throughout their volume the reader senses that the reality of culture is evoked by contributing academic authors, only to dismiss the beliefs of thousands of people as untrue/contrived/false. Connerton's (1989) understanding of culture was, perhaps, more empathic; for the sanctioning of the cultural self, suggests Connerton, is a process of legitimising history as a social memory that is known within the body and mind of the person. The space betwixt and between Druidic text, and the expression of culture, is both invention and legitimisation - yet much more - for this space is the place where identity is imaginatively brought into being as history and myth are re-interpreted to suit the ideological needs of the initiate/group. The process may be compared to the metamorphosis of an idea into a crystalline structure, reflecting a political need and offering a political solution to these social requirements. The 'social memory' of the Druid is therefore meaningful, present, and a potentially powerful force in the landscape of social politics. Rather than deny the existence of identity and culture as false, I wish to strive, within this essay, toward an academic empathy in relation to Druidry.

For Druids, re-interpreting the past involves understanding places as containers that literature can be projected into. Emplacing historic and mythic literature within landscapes, and making pilgrimage into these places, identifies a site as sacred and, within the context of this phenomenon, Druidic. Governed by textual forms, the journeys of modern-day Druids draw upon the Roman narratives of Caesar and Pliny, Celtic folklore, and other literature available at the Pagan end of the New Age market. Discovering a sense of self alongside an inspired sense of one's own potential, these texts prove to be fertile soils from which culture imaginatively flourishes within the space between word and action. Despite the selective, general, and approximate nature of myth and history, these themes allow brief glimpses into a past that is so easily imagined. Mythic-histories, through their nebulous nature, evade critical corroboration yet provide malleable substance from which identity is manipulated to the required specifications.

Druid and other Pagan groups today also compete for ownership of an imagined past. Concerned with the spaces between texts that deal with a Celtic and a pre-Romano-Christian era, modern-day witchcraft groups seeking self-definition also draw upon more classical texts. Tanya Luhrmann's *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft* (1992) discusses this process of imagining as an experience convincing initiate witches of their own cultural reality:

The magician needs to make sense of [spiritual experiences] in her understanding of herself. It would not be surprising if the experience were interpreted through, or understood within the context of, magical theory. That "making sense" is likely to be anchored in the net of magical theory, and as these new experiences sink into the background of the magician's life to form the basis of this future action, they may take the theory with them. The process of coming to terms with the vivid experience of magical practice may help to make magical ideas seem natural, unsurprising, unquestionable (ibid: 201).

The same is certainly true for Druids attempting to place themselves in the world. Writing in 1905, Squire promotes characters within Welsh folklore, 'The *Mabinogi*' and the Irish 'Tuatha de Danu', as members of the Gaelic Pantheon (1975: v-vii). In 1946, Graves says of these folk-tales, they are 'the lost rudiments of poetic magic' (1988: 17), 'a set of charms of varying antiquity' (ibid: 25), or else a 'poetic nightmare' (ibid: 26). Lending authenticity to this work, Graves goes on to draw endless comparisons between Celtic characters contained within folk-tales and the deities of ancient Greece and Rome.

Hebridean myths referring to the arrival of Christianity, St. Columba to the island of Iona, or else the arrival of Holy Grail in Glastonbury, are claimed as having Druidic associations contained within them. These themes, popular within the OBOD's *Gwersu*, form the basis of the OBOD's move away from Celtic Christian histories toward the idea of a Celtic Druid culture. The rituals of the *Gwersu* and subsequent ritual expressions of the initiate are understood by Druids to work

through such myth. Ritual myth and ritual history therefore support and legitimise culture as a spiritually focused reality, and Druidic culture exists through the knowledge, belief and the expression of their artistic forms. Introducing the initiate to leading characters from the Arthurian stories, several *Gwers* of the Druid grade allow the initiate to contemplate and then perform meditative acts that support ideas of a Celtic-Druid ideal. Among these characters, we find Guinevere, and the Lady of the Lake, while the ritual script for May's ceremony of Beltaine focuses upon Glastonbury as the arena where these mythic-narratives are emplaced. Hence, for the initiate, the landscape of the Vale of Avalon signifies the past in the present, while also referring to cyclic time. As a container of Druidic identity, the expression of the Druid self is fully made through pilgrimage into landscapes embodying ideas of identity.

The same is true of the Bardic grade's *Gwers*. The focus of these *Gwersu* is upon re-interpreting a pre-historic past in the present, namely: Newgrange and Tara in Eire; Scara Brae and other stone-age monuments in the Orkney Islands, or the Arthurian associations of Breton with Druidry. Folklorists and New Age writers lay down the foundations for Druidic appropriation of text, encouraging Druids today to understand stories such the Holy Grail within a Druidic paradigm. In *Celtic Myth and Legend* (Squire 1975), we read:

The Holy Grail is a Christian relic of marvellous potency. It had held the Pascal lamb eaten at the last supper, and after the death of Christ, Joseph of Arimathea had filled it with the Saviour's blood. But before it had received this colouring, it had been the magic cauldron of all the Celtic mythologies - the Dagda's "Undry"... Bran's cauldron of Renovation... the cauldron of Ogyrvran the Giant, from which the Muses ascended... and the cauldron captured by Arthur from the Chief of Hades (ibid: 366).

Following writers such as Squire and Graves, authors sympathetic to Druidry take the elaborations of folklore, themselves finding a space amid the text to re-interpret and promote the idea of Druidic identity. Matthews begins *Elements of the Grail Tradition* (1990) by mirroring Squire, using a chapter to drag the symbolism of the Holy Grail back in time, linking it with, among others, the Welsh Ceredwen's Cauldron, Bran's cauldron of rebirth and the Irish Dagda's cauldron of plenty. In the same series of *Element Books*, Philip Carr-Gomm describes the grail myths as a metaphor of the fall of Atlantis (1991: 7), as well as the cauldron being the origin of the grail symbol (ibid: 63, 112). Today, the landscape surrounding Glastonbury, the Vale of Avalon, is a place where tourists and pilgrims fill the New Age shops in the high street. For Glastonbury is a town with the reputation of being the first place in England to have a church built, as well as being well known for housing the resting place of the first Christian King - Arthur. Hence the myths associated with Glastonbury and the town's physical space have been claimed as pre-Christian through a process of literary elaboration. A similar tale can be told of St. Columba and his journey to Iona.

In the OBOD's *Gwers* 10, the initiate is informed of Celtic (or pre-Catholic) Christianity's close relationship with nature. The syncretic seeds planted within the minds of the reader are later nurtured through poetry in *Gwers* 29: 'What pleasure to be enclosed on an island, high upon a rock, where I may reflect on the sea in all of its moods (unknown 12th Century). Christianity, we read, has its roots contained within a very Pagan method of thinking and living. In *Gwers* posted to the initiate, the connections between self, place and spirituality of the Scottish Hebrides are more fully explored. The supplement concerning Iona echoes an imagined relationship between Druids, Coloman history, the sea and landscape of Iona as a mirror of Christ that is responded to by Columba as well as by Pagan Druid priests. "There is evidence to show that Iona was one of the holy places of Druidic tradition, and that the two bishops, whom Columba found established there, were half-Christianised Druids" (Supplementary *Gwers* of the Ovate grade). These processes of 'invention' are important examples of the ways through which we all create our own sense of self in the world, a phenomenon Remensnyder names imaginative memory (Remensnyder 1995). Seeking cultural memories hidden within literature, the reader explores the value and the emotional meaning that lie beyond the text. For Druids, mythic-histories become gateways into an ever-present reality where the spirits of Druidry exist and are always accessible.

Yet Druids seem to be acutely aware of the malleable nature of their newly-found selves, searching for alternative literature to inspire and under-pin their Druidry. During an interview in September 1999 at the home of Philip Shallcrass, Chief Druid of the British Druid Order, Philip informed me that understanding his own life processes is enabled through studying the Welsh stories of Ceredwen, Taliesin and the Rhiannon. I enquired which texts had inspired Philip to make pilgrimage. They included; *The White Goddess* by Robert Graves, *A Guide to Prehistoric and Roman Monuments in England and Wales* by Jaquetta Hawkes, and *Prehistoric Avebury* by Aubrey Burl.

Philip also made inner-journeys into visualised landscapes, the inspiration for which included less academic works such as the hippy alternative *IT* magazines of the late 1960s, J. R. Tolkein's *Lord of the Rings*, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, *Dharma Bums* and *Desolation Angels*, Carlos Castaneda's *The Teachings of Don Juan*, and so on. Philip also drew inspiration from Mircea Eliade's *Shamanism* - the nature of his Druidry involving work with animal spirits. 'It's all about nature' Philip explained. 'It's about *animals*, plants, trees, rocks, sea, air. It's all of that brought into what you do within Druidry. All of that - the world becomes your cauldron of inspiration'. These inner-journeys seem to mark an initial experience (or a first intimate contact), serving as an imaginative exploration of the space that lies between text and act. The pilgrimage is the third stage permitting the total experience. The whole process is one of cultural self-definition, and self-assertion in shared landscapes expressed through belief. 'One of [the effects of pilgrimage] is to put the Druid in intimate contact with the flow of the seasons, the intimacy of the Earth, the plant and animal families, the elements of creation' (Shallcrass pers comm.).

Folklore, along with the academic disciplines, provides rudimentary information that is incorporated into Philip's Druidry through ritual expression. Philip's journeys therefore contain a syncretic mix of archaeology, sociology, theology, as well as mythic-history. Re-inventing the past in the present involves bringing the landscape to life, animating it with its own personality (or spirit), or gendering the inanimate place as a living deity (usually female).

At Stonehenge, some Druids I have spoken with understand this site as a temple associated with King Arthur of Camelot, although it was Geoffrey of Monmouth who, in *The History of the Kings of Briton*, famously associated the Stones with the Welsh Druid Merlin and the site as a memorial to the Germanic Chieftain, Hengist (Piggott 1977: 136, Nichols 1992: 157-158). Today, Stonehenge remains a site still associated with Druids, with initiates invoking the spirit of both Arthur and the Welsh Merlin. The nearby Avebury stone circle, and the surrounding complex of prehistoric monuments, are considered feminine in opposition to the masculinity of Stonehenge. Philip told me of a chambered Barrow named after the Nordic God Woden or Odin, although monuments and the planet Earth are generally considered feminine; Ceredwen, Bride, Anu, the exceptions being Cernunnos or the Green Man - stag God of the forest. Literature therefore supports ideas of the sacred, and Druids (and I strongly suspect *all* initiates of the open school) emplace selected texts upon localities, moving toward and through these places in pilgrimage. In text, ideas are stated, and in visualisation ideas are created. The ritual performance is dependent upon both, and singular ritual acts such as indoor circle casting, meditation, praying, working with animal spirits and the elements, visualising, or invoking the Goddess in one's living room, all serve to create a sense of identity. Only in pilgrimage are these ritual parts made whole through their projection upon landscapes. Only in pilgrimage is Druidic culture fully realised by the initiate.

On the Iona pilgrimage, May 1999, I met a Bard named Svanr (the appropriated name of a Viking warrior Chief) who joined OBOD after surfing the web and reading *The Book of Druidry* (Nichols 1992). During a Druid Autumn pilgrimage to the Vale of the White Horse in Oxfordshire in the same year, a Druid named Dan informed me of the inspiration he received from a book called *Male Mysteries* (Stewart 1991). Dan used the book to assist him with a pilgrimage concluding with an initiation into the mysteries of manhood. 'Reaching my destination, we then performed a visualisation of awakening a king, represented the heart'. Rebecca joined the Order after contacting John Matthews, the author of a book on Druidry she had enjoyed reading. Working with the *Gwers*, Rebecca later moved to Glastonbury. 'After finishing the Bardic Grade' explained Rebecca, 'it seemed like all my experiences were like the lessons coming to life. So I had to live through them. I didn't have to consciously make that happen, it was part of the magic of it - just tied together'.

On the Iona pilgrimage, the only book I ever saw the Chief of the OBOD with was *Rilke's Book of Hours: Love Poem to God* (Barrows and Macy 1996). An appropriate text, given the considered presence of Christ by many visitors to this place, and the encouragement given to initiates through

the *Gwersu* to find inspiration through poetry. Perhaps the best example I have experienced of the appropriation of historical text performed in a contemporary arena is that of the Wicker Man.

Famously noted by Caesar as the most barbaric of ceremonies, the Wicker Man re-surfaced at the OBOD's Uffington pilgrimage as a 25-foot-high effigy. The figure was surrounded by 100 robed initiates who set the figure alight in a ritual honouring of the spirit of the Harvest (chapter 6). It is clear that Druids are re-thinking the past in the present. While historians attempt to construct the past from written narratives, or in the case of archaeology, re-construct lifestyles from shards of pot, or forgotten cultures from monuments in the landscape, Druids are also in the business of manipulating these same artefacts and sites to suit their own ideas of culture. However, while archaeologists deal solely with re-constructing an imagined past, Druids focus upon creating culture in the present using the same selective points of reference. In the same way, society today uses the past to legitimise and empower its own sense of self; Connerton's social memory consisting of myth and monumentality emplaced within a meaningful landscape (Connerton 1989).

Journeys into these landscapes are so important for Druids, as they become the most useful form of self-empowerment, and one of the few corridors of communications with society through which their presence, beliefs and ideologies can be asserted. The opening statement of this chapter, that 'Druidry exists in the space between text and expression' may now be re-considered as the space from which all political needs flow forth. The Druid's will toward a politically relevant existence may be understood and classified as three inter-related stages:

Stage 1) A narrative bearing some relation to a required identity is entered into by the reader. Many people from a Druid group may study similar texts as authors gain reputations for being authorities on their chosen subjects. Hence familiarity with literature can be an individual or collective experience. Among these authors are Philip Carr-Gomm, Ronald Hutton, Liz and Colin Murray, Emma Restall Orr, Marion Green. In the light of socio-religious uncertainty, hermeneutic enquiry becomes a quest for socio-political identity. The individual is empowered as an emotional attachment is made to text as idea (that Druidic tradition and one's identity is somehow preserved in narratives), creating a sense that the Druidic self is extant and relevant today. A prime example of this is the Druid's belief that the landscape is a living deity and, empowered by this belief, that Druids are guardians of this Goddess and therefore socially useful.

Stage 2) Stage 1 permits the space between the text and idea, and the expression of this space, to be explored. This can be a swift interpretation of literature, or a prolonged consideration - either way, this is an imaginative process. Many Druids understand, and explore through meditation, this space as a reality that lies beyond script - as a real place where the spiritual deities and ancestors reside. In stage 2, concepts such as theology or myth are then projected (emplaced) upon natural landscapes.

The space between text and expression, once neutral, is now considered as a possible remedy to self uncertainty - the words on the page an inspiration and vision. This space between text and expression is now transformed into a place from where socio-political will is invoked in the guise of Gods and Goddesses. At Glastonbury, I have witnessed, within a recently constructed stone circle, the invocation to the ancestors of the Palaeolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age, followed by an honouring to the characters of the Arthurian myths. On Iona, the animal spirits of the cardinal directions and their associated elemental spirits were invoked in a ceremonial circle. I have also experienced, as an initiate, similar phenomena in Druidic circles created within living rooms, old church halls or gardens. In stage 2, the location is not important - only the consideration of the space between text and expression. The location may be rural, urban, indoors or out. This stage of the process is more a rehearsal than a proper cultural expression.

Stage 3) The distinction between the consideration and rehearsal detailed above, and stage 3 as the performative expression of self, is important. Individually, or collectively, ideas of culture that are drawn from the cauldron of possibilities are emplaced in landscapes and then physically and collectively expressed through ritual, song, poetry, the syncretic use of Gaelic and so on. The ultimate expression of Druidic culture (drawn from texts whose authors have surely manipulated the literature they have studied), is through pilgrimage into selected landscapes such as Stonehenge, Uffington or Iona. This act of pilgrimage is, then, a claim upon places that are already used and controlled by society - tourist sites, archaeological monuments and so on. Hence, pilgrimage becomes a political response to the Druid's own sense of social uncertainty in the form of cultural re-birth.

The invocation to characters contained within meaningful text may be made in any location (indoors or out), and this is demonstrated above in stage 2. But the act of pilgrimage to selected rural locations where the deities of Druidry reside physically places the Druid priest within the three-dimensional arena of their text - for example, Glastonbury. This process of pilgrimage truly distinguishes Druidry from other, similar, forms of Paganism such as witchcraft (a religion dealing with Classical, as well as Celtic myth, and the manipulation of natural forces to create magical spells), or Heathenism (with its mythic-histories rooted in the Viking Sagas). The whole process serves to define, for the Druid, appropriate landscapes as sacred, enabling the initiate or group to claim these spaces as Druidic.

This expression of self by the closed schools of English Druidry, and groups such as the OBOD (or the British Druid Order), tend toward the politically symbolic - although their ritual activities may be considered socio-religious alternatives by many initiates, they are not radical, and are often verbally denied as political. This denial of the political self assists in maintaining, for these groups, an identity and relationship within a perceived liminality from which these initiates consider the true essence of Druidic inspiration to flow. The denial of political meaning ensures the flow of inspiration is not hampered by matters unrelated to the spirit.

Alternatively, the ceremonial performances of the Council of British Druid Orders remain explicitly political as they contest landscapes through non-violent direct activity. The presence of the media at sites of contention certainly assists Druids in their battle for recognition. The uncompromising methods of ritual-negotiation used by these groups with the police, heritage bodies, and archaeologists (see later chapters) all contribute toward a sense of self-assurance as the pilgrims aspire toward the certainty of their Druidry as a newly emerging culture. Druids want to be heard, and pilgrimage serves as a vehicle for Druids to communicate their intent.

Thus, using the symbolisms of pilgrimage, Druidry faces the challenge of having to communicate beliefs to the non-initiated who are unable (and maybe unwilling) to decipher the seemingly surreal beliefs of landscape as deity, or stone as bone, ancestor as tree, chambered barrow as a gateway to the Otherworld, or any other number of projected beliefs inspired by text. While pilgrimage becomes the vehicle for Druids to communicate with each other, and to define their beliefs to the un-initiated world around them, ritual journeys may be considered ritual theatre with individuals performing their ideas of theology and self in arenas that we may consider to be sacred stages. Below I will explore, more fully, the ways that 1) performance theory underpins the Druid's pilgrimage as a ritual act, and 2) the Druid's ritual journey serves as a vehicle for political expression. Finally, I will demonstrate the role of landscape as an organising scheme containing these phenomena.

Chapter 2. Performing ritual.

Authors of religious studies, along with theologians, consider the cognitive processes through which pilgrims find inspiration for their ritual journeys, and these processes assist us in understanding the diverse ways in which Druids today find inspiration in today's landscape. Peter Harbison explains pilgrimage as a 'performance' inspired by 'a combination of factors including belief, faith, hope, inquisitiveness and the search for forgiveness or a cure' (1992: 23-27). The Druidic belief in the living presence of a nature-based deity certainly permits the landscape to be understood as an intelligent force capable of granting the wishes of the individual. Many Pagans have informed me how they understand Glastonbury's holy spring, the Chalice Well, as a place where healing can be sought. Two Druid protesters who made a ritual journey to North Norfolk (see chapter 5) told me how the oaks timbers from the Bronze Age Seahenge monument in Norfolk are considered special. Mud gathered from beneath the timbers of the Seahenge monument, they believed, is capable of transforming the lives of people using it, informing the individual of the spirit and will of the Goddess, and therefore has the capacity to drastically alter the perceptions of the person using the mud.

In Robert Ousterhot's *The Blessings of Pilgrimage* (1990), Sabine MacCormack (ibid: 7-40) follows Ousterhot's discussions of the pilgrims' responses to architecture - in the case of the Druids, places within the landscape are perceived as architectural monuments created by the ancestors for ritual. Chambered barrows suddenly become bridges between this reality and the mystical Otherworld (*Gwers* of the Bardic grade) - reliquaries if you like for the spirits of the ancestors, or places to journey toward for initiation into the ancestral family of Paganism. During a pilgrimage to the West Kennet Long Barrow as an initiate in 1995, I recall four Druids all joining hands, touching the sides of the inner-chamber of the barrow, and meditating upon the place as a bridge between the seen and un-seen realms. These imaginative process, embodied through emotion, represent, for the pilgrim, the core and very essence of Druidic belief.

Grace Davie's sociological study of the way Christians today believe without belonging (1996) suggests to me a sense of belief without the trappings of the ritual church performance. Reducing ritual belief to its very foundations, Davie's thesis focuses upon imagination as the sustenance of religious identity. In order to understand, more fully, the movements of Druids toward places imagined to be sacred, we need to first consider disciplinary theories that inform us of the social consequences of pilgrimage as performance. Victor and Edith Turners' studies of ritual and pilgrimage as a social theatre are detailed below.

Conducting fieldwork under the guidance and inspiration of Max Gluckman's Manchester school of anthropology, Victor Turner first identified ritual theatre as a means of dealing with social anxieties. In Turner's ethnography of life in an African Ndembu village (1957), cultural performance is identified as a structural part of everyday life. Victor and Edith Turner worked together on defining pilgrimage as a social theatre, serving as a cultural pressure valve, and thereby permit a 'sense of play' to enter into the

formalities of the ordinary (Turner and Turner 1979). Considering the narratives of theatre more meaningful than 'dry' academic text (ibid: 89-93), Victor Turner experimented with the Ndembu villager's ritual-theatre as an essential element of undergraduate tuition in New York. Drawing upon his own childhood experiences (and reflecting anthropological trends in reflexive study current around the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s), Turner worked to improve the intimacy of tuition, through his reflexive theatre studies (1982).

Despite these shifts towards post-modernism, the Turners remain renowned for their structural theories of the sacred, and throughout their literary productions the social theatre of pilgrimage has predominated as a theme. Turnerian thought concentrates upon the unifying power of the liminal (van Gennep 1977), along with performances located externally to places of worship - the liminoid zone. Within Turnerian studies of the limen are studies of the intra-personal community, although this idea of *communitas* is itself fraught with contradiction, requiring clarification. On one hand 'spontaneous *communitas*' is free from ideological constraint as it exists beyond society in a state of anti-structure (although anti-structure is itself dependent upon the rigidity of social structure). Alternatively, 'ideological *communitas*' is a blueprint for social reform. It is politically meaningful and therefore extends the experience of the collective group beyond spontaneous play. Aside from the Turners brief acknowledgements of the political intent of pilgrimages in Mexico and England's Walsingham (ibid: 30), other writings mostly negate socio-political symbolisms, concentrating instead upon the metaphor of anti-structure, acts within the pilgrim's theatre, and the maintenance of a sense of 'serious play' (1982). Thus political meaning is acknowledged and permitted within Turnerian thought, chiefly through ideological *communitas* (Turner and Turner 1979: 252).

Michael Sallnow's study of pilgrimage in the Andes (1987) placed liminoid activity within re-defined landscapes that are multi-layered and expressive of various social phenomena. In such landscapes, religious meanings merge with mainstream concerns and are asserted on various levels of social thought and activity. In 1991 Sallnow (also a student of Max Gluckman) joined forces with John Eade, invoking the idea of the sacred in order to suggest profanity, promoting pilgrimage as an activity that is as politically contentious as Turner considered it harmonious. Accepting that landscape and pilgrimage have a multitude of meanings, Eade and Sallnow go onto define the pilgrim's landscape as an arena of separation and social division. For Eade and Sallnow, the communal meaning of pilgrimage is negated by its own goals where contesting groups use movement through historically-mapped landscapes as an act of self-assertion and social exclusivity. In the words of Coleman and Elsner (1995):

[Eade and Sallnow] invoked the notion of the sacred, only to reveal it - at least in its manifestation in pilgrimage - as a fragmented, ambitious, ideological battleground (ibid: 199)... the implications of Eade and Sallnow's position go much further, since they are prepared to actually contemplate abandoning the idea that pilgrimage, as a socially discrete phenomenon, even exists (200).

It is clear that Druidry certainly invokes the idea of the sacred, and that these invocations to the sacred, in the form of pilgrimage and ceremonial prayer, have meanings that reach beyond those sought by the initiates themselves. Catherine Bell's *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (1992) also acknowledges (briefly) the many ways in which ritual can be understood as historically meaningful and socially integrative, conclusively fixing her ritual agenda within a reflexive paradigm.

By emphasising the political meanings present within numerous textual discourses, Bell shows how 'Ritualisation is a strategic play of power, of domination and resistance, within the area of the social body' (Bell 1992: 204). Echoing Pierre Bourdieu's sociological ideas of linguistic, symbolic and practised forms of structured behaviour - *habitus* (see Bourdieu 1990, 1997) - Bell defines ritual as a social manipulation and a negotiated control of power within the body; a power that defines/empowers/dominates a pre-constructed self. The negotiating body feeds into the pilgrimages of the Druids. Rather than adhering to a pre-ordained prototype (initiates have no memorable history to draw upon - hence their own self-constructions), Druids use the ritual body, that is the pilgrim, as a form of implicit or explicit negotiation within social landscapes and the society that controls these spaces. These negotiations are seen at prehistoric archaeological sites such as the Uffington White Horse in Oxfordshire, as the OBOD, through pilgrimage, re-define this site as sacred and Druidic. At prehistoric circles such as Stonehenge, Avebury and Seahenge, sites are explicitly contested as the English Heritage, archaeologists and the police are confronted in the pilgrimages of protest of the Council of British Druid Orders (see later chapters). The roots of modern Druidry, it seems, lie not in the idea of an Avalonian ideal, but in a social ideology. (See also Durkheim's (1971) general critiques of ritual and religion as a response to a social, rather than an esoteric need.)

In *How Societies Remember* (1989), Paul Connerton demonstrates how ritual, performance and knowledge are embodied within the self (or symbolised within architecture) - Connerton's social memory. In the preface to this book, echoing perhaps Bourdieu's ideas of habitual manipulation, Connerton states that 'Images of the past and recollected knowledge are conveyed and sustained by ritual performances, and that performative memory is bodily. Bodily social memory is an essential aspect of social memory' (ibid). For Connerton, knowledge is power, and the control of knowledge and the places where it is embedded is a matter of politics. For Druidic pilgrims, ritual is a bodily act commemorating systems of belief, yet also a negotiative act with a dominant socio-religious force - mainstream society. Through application of the ritual text, Druidic knowledge is expressed in forms familiar to the ceremonial forms of pilgrimage - ceremonial robes mirror and reflect the Druid's belief in self, and the bodily habits of ceremony reflect and express this knowledge. Invocations and prayers are then considered as manipulations of the hidden forces that exist beyond the mundanity of the social realm. For Druids, these processes of habit remember aspects the self and are negated by mainstream society and religion. Reproducing ritual (ibid: 22) is therefore a performative acknowledgement of one's place in society, and a negotiation with one's given culture. In this way, pilgrimage becomes a political drama - a literal 'play of power'.

Encouraging the expression of belief through commemorative ritual acts, the *Gwersu* introduces the neophyte to deities of the inner-Order available within the ceremonial circle, or simply as spirits to be considered throughout the day. Various Druids interviewed at the 1998 Glastonbury retreat stated how, in quiet meditation, they would contemplate Druidry and its deities when walking pet dogs in the countryside, or by simply being centred within Druidry as a system of belief. Rather than informally express Druidry in the mundane, Robert, a professor of history, stated how he expressed his 'everyday world in Druidry'. More elaborate Druid ceremonies (or festivals) serve to formally celebrate the Earth and all of nature as animate. Quiet thoughts, ritual acts, and detailed ceremony are therefore all acts of socio-religious dissatisfaction, and it is tempting to interpret ritual forms such as pilgrimage as compensating for the failures of mainstream society. Speaking with numerous Druids of the OBOD, I have often sensed (that is, instinctively felt) a latent political radicalism ready to burst forth - only for this to be subdued within a ceremonial acts which serve to channel the desires of social dissent into passive religious symbolism. For example, Druids feel extremely concerned about social issues surrounding pollution, animal testing, genetic farming, greed and warfare generally (and other negative forms numerous initiates identify with capitalism). Many speak passionately and become angry, yet turn to the ancestors and the Goddess in ceremony or prayer. Collective melancholia replaces radical anger, and in turn, this is transformed from a feeling of powerlessness into the beautiful expression of three-dimensional ritual-poetics. Ritual therefore empowers the artist, and disempowers the social self.

Here, I do not wish to state that all Druids of groups such as the OBOD and the British Druid Order are politically impotent. While some Druids remain active only as Druids, others will give a small portion of their mundane time to actively supporting political alternatives. During an interview Philip Shallcrass, Chief Druid of the BDO, happily referred to himself as an anarchist;

I would describe myself as an anarchist and have been since I was a small child, but I don't see any point of being antagonistic just for the sake of it. It was one of the great thrills of my life, discovering anarchy in the dictionary and finding out what it meant. It meant there was a definition for what I believed - not having leaders (pers comm. 1998).

In a private interview with Philip and Stephanie Carr-Gomm, Stephanie, Scribe to the OBOD, spoke passionately to me of the ways in which Druidry contests the moral values of Western society:

[The Order] allows people to know their inner-morality. People can have their own sense of morality, and that is what gives me the collective mind of Druidry. As Druids we can say 'no - we don't want genetically engineered food or mega-ton bombs'... Institutions are telling you are not capable of making your own values and that they have to do it for you (pers comm.. 1998).

On Iona in 1999, Philip Carr-Gomm spoke of how he supported local residents chaining themselves to mature trees in order to prevent their felling. After a series of telephone calls, and within a few hours,

tree preservation orders had been placed upon all of the local oaks. The trees remain. James Perfect's thesis for the University of Wales, Lampeter (1999), acknowledges the political beliefs of many pilgrims at the OBOD's Uffington retreat: [Within] insular circles of the Pagan movement [ecologists] are listened to as they are seen as the pioneers (64)... Essentially, the view of Druids is that technology has accelerated beyond humanity's ability to control, and beyond humanity's need' (ibid: 77).

The dichotomy arises as the OBOD (and I suspect the BDO) promote and perform their rituals that are veiled in implicit political meanings, while at the same time denying their political power. Such fundamentalism is carefully avoided in order to, perhaps, maintain a distinction between the sacred liminal, and the secular world of political thought and activity. However, many Chief Druids, and most initiates I have met, all admire the radicalism of King Arthur Pendragon, while rejecting the confrontational ways in which such radicalism occurs. It seems to me that the rituals of the OBOD and BDO focus upon the sacred as a healing force that is capable of uniting groups of people, rather than battling for a cause through protestant activity. This leads many Druids (of the OBOD certainly) to deny the spiritual relevance of the Council of British Druid Orders as properly Druidic. James Perfect articulates this dismissive attitude. Placing COBDO at the head of pan-Druidic hierarchy, Perfect then negates the Council, writing 'the Council seems to do very little' (Perfect 1999: 33). Perfect has been misinformed, as King Arthur and other Council members promote modern Druidry, alongside working to secure free access to Stonehenge with numerous other Druid groups. Their approach is radical in its uncompromising style of negotiation - non-violent protest. Yet Perfect's statements concerning COBDO mirror quite correctly sentiments of many pilgrims attending numerous OBOD retreats. Finally, Perfect dismisses the Council as a non-Druidic minority on the periphery of English Paganism. If we follow Perfect's thesis, and my own research supports Perfect, there are two schools of thought within the OBOD - the first claiming admiration for Arthur, the second disassociating themselves with his group. Pilgrimage becomes, as Eade and Sallnow suggest, a means of articulating divisions within and between groups.

My own research at Uffington (and other pilgrimages), revealed inter-group tensions that mirrored those suggested by Perfect. Questioning the political radicalism of Arthur's LAWB (and therefore COBDO, a group chaired by Arthur Pendragon), the group listened sceptically to a lecture given by Arthur calling for initiates to campaign for free access at Stonehenge. Outside of the meeting, I learnt that several OBOD pilgrims were also initiates of Arthur's LAWB. Conflicts concerning ritual forms therefore arise between Druids who consider political activity as non-Druidic (a reminder perhaps of the socio-political focus of the closed schools of Druidry), and initiates who maintain that political activity is indeed relevant as a ceremonial expression of belief, this expression being pilgrimage as a means of contestation.

Pilgrimage into landscapes draw the initiate into a three-dimensional expression of ideology, the resonance of which depends upon the political will of the group performing the act. In *Ritual Criticism* (1990) Ronald Grimes noticed:

A source of controversy during the [Canadian] festival was a split between performers who saw their work as cultural and those who saw it as political. 'Culturalists' emphasised form and techniques, while 'the engaged' emphasised social content and political relevance. Several definitions of the situation emerged. Some viewed it as ritual or communal celebration; some thought of it as informal education. Some held that it was a way of preserving culture; others, a way of transforming it (Grimes 1990: 8).

Later in this study, Grimes avoids political paradigms, 'thus, we are enabled to explore all kinds of composite, boundary-line, or anomalous activities such as ritual drama, civil ceremony, military parades, and museum openings' (ibid: 15). In 1977, Richard Schechner presented performance as the basis for ritual and conflict resolution in every-day life. Some 13 years later in *By Means of Performance* (1991) Schechner's statement that; 'cultures are most fully expressed and made conscious of themselves in their ritual and theatrical performances' (ibid: 1-8) continued to mirror Turnerian thought. The monograph is dedicated to Victor Turner, with one chapter of this compendium given to Victor's studies of the liminal zone (8-18), and a second to Edith Turner's self-reflexive account of a Yaqui Deer Dance (82-95).

As Bourdieu, Eade, Sallnow, and Bell draw the reader's attention to the political paradigms of ritual and performance, Grimes and Schechner withdrew from political critique as a focus for theory, reducing ritual once more to a cultural theatre. It is this idea of culture that is used by groups such as the BDO (and the OBOD) to understand their journeys into landscapes and the and ritual performances used to express their ideas.

Felicia Hughes-Freeland's symposium (1998) also transforms ritual performance as a communicative act, transcending the constraints of fixed structures toward more flexible boundaries. From the sacred events in Walsingham (ibid: 46-65), to the Welsh Eisteddfod and its construction of a local identity (141-159), and the ballerina's multiple relationships with self, character and audience (29-45), the ritual act is re-considered as a reflexive tool for negotiating claims in dominant societies. (See page 82 of this thesis). As we shall see in later chapters, Druids, like Coleman and Elsner's Walsingham pilgrims (1998), contest archaeological interpretations of sites, as well as constructing Hastrup's complex and self-reflexive forms within the rite.

Hastrup's ritual-theatre blurs the lines between Van Gennep's sacred and profane realms of the limen. As the ballerina dances her character into being, the performance transforms as if it were a sacred act. Working through the inspired presence of the on-looking audience, the dancer allows her evoked character to take over her body as she removes her self from the act watching her character at play. As the character takes over the bodily performance, the relationships between stage and audience dramatically change. The audience, captivated by the unusual posture of the dancing figure (see also Barba and Savarese 1991), enjoy the sense of otherness, applaud these strange bodily changes, willing the artist to think and act differently. The evoked character controls the movements of the ballerina, the

audience reacts, and through the reaction of the audience, the performance is complete. Obedient and responsive to the will of the collective, the performer passively watches the dance from inside herself.

Emerging from the tensions between the performer's idea of herself, and the actual performance of the dance, her experience becomes reflexive - a relationship between self and evoked self as the character emerges from the tension of the moment. Here, Hastrup progresses to Shakespeare, and I to Druidry. For within theatres of Druidry performed in front of an un-initiated audience, the same multiple relationships can be seen as Druids perform their ritual-roles. During these public ceremonies, others observe the rite and the Druid's cultural self emerges from the tension that exist between theological idea and the social need to assert these ideas in an arena shared with the non-initiated. The ballerina's stage becomes the pilgrim's sacred landscape - the stage of ideas. The director of performance becomes the Chief Druid leading and watching over the ritual proceedings of the players. Finally, the dancer's character transforms into the Druid's invoked deity - Hastrup's double agency. Born from the tension to assert and resolve a sense of self, those multiple relationships created through double agency are justified through ceremony. As the Druid moves into a landscape to perform this self, this stage is, implicitly, claimed as Druidic, and the theological ideas emplaced within it permit the Druid an intimate and privileged relationship with this place. I believe that, emerging as culturally relevant, the imaginative performance of idea, and the invocation to deity becomes a political play of power - the appropriation of landscape and the subsequent legitimisation of the self.

Philip Shallcrass, Chief Druid of the BDO explained to me, in an interview, held in his home in 1999, how the resolution of conflict is a theme that runs through some of the ritual performances of the BDO. Through ritual journeys made into landscapes considered sacred, Philip legitimises his own Druid self by performing the role of ritual-peace-maker. These acts of pilgrimage serve to express the deeply held views of many initiates I have spoken with, that the landscape needs to be championed, thereby implying ownership of these places:

The point of the pilgrimage [is] to try and end a conflict. The conflict was represented beautifully in the landscape because on one side was this Anglo-Saxon built wall - one of those great Earthen banks - Wandsdyke that was built to separate Romano-Celtic Britain on the north, and the Saxons in the south. So, the modern conflict that we were working with was reflected in this ancient conflict and the barrier (ibid).

Later in the same interview, Philip informed me of how, while attending road by-pass protests with groups of environmentalist protesters, the rituals of the BDO are designed to diffuse any potential confrontation with the those policing the site:

Even when we've done ritual on protest sites, we've asked if we can be there. We get invited, usually by the protesters. We will then make a point of asking the police, and asking the builders and anyone else if it's all right with them. Only if it is will we go ahead and do what

we want to do, and explain to them as much as they like what it is we are going to do - that we're going to work with the spirit of the place and make ritual - that we're not going to turn-up armed to the teeth. so we do it in a non-confrontational way. What we do is not about confrontation, it's just about the opposite... It's about healing conflict. We've been working with the authorities at Stonehenge for years to do the same thing, to resolve conflict and to make ritual there (ibid).

In more public arenas (such as Stonehenge or Avebury), initiates watch each other as culture is created in ceremony. In turn, Druids are watched by a non-initiated audience outside of their ritual circle. Rather than the experiences of tourist/practitioner emerging (or diverging) through the experience of voyeurism (Morinis 1992: 47-61), the experience is determined and controlled through exclusive access into the pilgrim's arena that separates an audience unfamiliar and unconcerned with a Druid renaissance. (For Hastrup, all that is required of the audience is their presence and interest in the proceedings.) In the public ceremonies of the Druids the audience does not participate and, unlike the initiate, does not assist in the process of rebirth nor the contestation of the pilgrimage site. Indeed, the uninitiated audience seem to view the Druid's ceremony as a part of their tourist experience, and Druidic pilgrimage serves to contend such matters of aesthetics. The uninitiated audience serves to simply highlight the divide between those with knowledge, and those ignorant of the Druid's cognitive processes. However, the contestation of sites such as Stonehenge does not require an audience to be physically present, as the very act of pilgrimage itself serves to transform the site from archaeological monument into an arena claimed, through the ritual, into a sacred space (Appendix 5).

To conclude, the sacred landscapes of Druidry are containers for a multitude of phenomena provided in text, understood through contemplation, and expressed through ritual journeys to archaeological sites, or group retreats into areas that are considered sacred. Beyond ideas formulated through text, the individual seeks to imaginatively express identity. Between text and expression lies a tension of needing to express identity in places where Paganism has no place within the mainstream social fabric of life. Through the Druid's inventive responses to this anxiety of needing to express one's sense of self (occasionally voiced, and always implicitly present), emerges pilgrimage as a vehicle for the Druid's cultural expression. The construction of the journey begins in the idea of self that is supported by texts pertaining to history and myth that are emplaced within landscapes. These spaces are properly appropriated by the Druid physically moving into these places. The whole process of the inventive journey secures, within the mind of the initiate, the idea that Druidic culture truly exists. Amy Remensnyder names this process of invention 'imaginative' (Remensnyder 1995), and the focus of the Druid's imagination is the mythical landscape as an organising principle into which flows everything that the initiate considers as culturally applicable to self. Hence, the imaginative process through which Druids create their own sense of self is a process maintained by embedding ideas of culture deep within the landscape. Located within soil and stone, ideas pertaining to Druidic culture are always present, always available, and are imaginatively remembered and expressed through pilgrimage.

Chapter 3. Re-claiming the land: local pilgrimage/silent protest.

In chapter 2, ritual performances are defined as events occurring at places such as Stonehenge, Uffington or Iona. Below I will show how places of Druidic pilgrimage, rather than occurring at sites far from the pilgrim's place of residence, may be considered by Druids as any rural place the initiate has access to - for the Druid's deities reside in both the garden or local countryside. (The Goddess of the Druid is considered a deity of nature, and pilgrimages made in Her honour are generally located in the countryside rather than urban settings.) The construction of the ritual circle and the invocation to the Goddess deepen the experience of a locality. These local places are concerns of the individual Druid working as a solitary practitioner, but also of Druid groups local to a place.

This chapter acknowledges, and reveals more fully, the tacit political processes of two groups; an investigation of two local Groves of the Order of Bards Ovates and Druids is followed by an examination of two interviews with the Chief Druid of the British Druid Order. These group studies are important as they offer partial insights into two Druid groups with the greatest number of initiates. The OBOD's central office in Sussex claim at least 10,000 Bardic initiates, while the Chief Druid of the BDO claims 2000 initiates and an additional 1500 associate members (un-initiated companions). All of these group members are spread thinly around England and comprise a mixture of people such as academics, teachers, artists, New Age healers, shop workers, farmers, the unemployed and so on. Within the OBOD, Grove members often focus their ritual activities within private residences in urban areas, or accept invitations of group members with suitable spaces in more rural locations.

The Brigante.

A fully functioning OBOD Grove will have two leading figures sharing responsibility for organising and directing the ritual performance: the Chief Druid (usually a man), and a Grove Mother. The Scribe completes the Druidic triad, and the youngest or most recent member of the group is named the *Mabinog* (Welsh for wise-child). The other ritual players take roles dependent upon the ritual script, although one member stands at each of the four quarters of the ritual circle representing the four elements of earth, air, fire and water. The circle is then cast, often by the Chief Druid, and purified by two companions with the blessed elements of fire and water. Other Pagan publications also promote this structure as essential elements of Wicca (Starhawk 1979, Adler 1986, appendix 3), and the same ritual formula are used by all groups I have encountered. Hence, Druidry may be considered a phenomenon of New Age Pagan literature. The newly formed Brigante Grove of the OBOD are no exception to this rule.

Theresa, an initiated Druid of OBOD and the motivating force behind the re-birth of the Brigante Grove, is also an associate of the British Druid Order. Placing the Grove in the BDO's contacts list as well as the OBOD's internet web site, her group seeks to attract initiates from two Druid groups. At the

Uffington retreat where we met, I received an invitation from Theresa and Idris, the Chief Druid of this Grove, to their first Winter ceremony in 1999.

I knew I would be cold - December ceremonies in the Lancashire Hills always are. Of all the Winter ceremonies I had performed in twelve years, this 1999 solstice ritual was the coldest, for this ritual circle was held beneath a starry sky, high upon the frozen moors over-looking Blackburn. Greeted at the station by Idris, I set off toward Pendle Hill to rendezvous with Theresa, the Grove mother. Driving through the night, Idris excitedly told me of his planned involvement with the newly formed Megalithic Order of Druids and the prospect of a southward journey to build stone circles later in the Summer. This Winter's Brigantian circle, on the high grounds of a farmhouse, turned out to be a ritual circle defined by twenty-five newly planted saplings inspired by Colin and Liz Murray's Ogham Tree alphabet (1991), a ritual system of divination promoted in the OBOD's *Gwersu*.

Already, we see this group working with three mythic-histories. The first, and most obvious, the use of the name Brigante, a Celtic tribe associated with the Romano-British period. Around AD. 60 the Romans noted that their tribal Queen was named Cartimandua. Little else is known of this group, unlike their Iceni neighbours under the rule of Boudicca (Somerset Fry 1982). To Druids of the OBOD, these snippets of history suggest a social order inclusive of a female hierarchy. Adopting the tribal name of the Brigante, this Grove fixes the femininity of the OBOD upon their new tribe. The second refers to the Tree Ogham, a phonetic script dating to the 6th century AD (Carr-Gomm 1991:104-105), although Liz Murray places its origins in the 1st century BC (Murray 1991: 7-8). The system certainly originates in Eire where standing stones are decorated with the staves, and Druids, write Carr-Gomm and Murray, memorised the magic and language associated with the script. Irish folklore attributes the Ogham's invention to Ogma, popularly adopted as the sun God of knowledge (Graves 1988: 113). Here we notice that Irish myth is appropriated and re-evaluated by Druids as a ritual tool in the present, while the Celtic priests are accredited with literary and magical skills. The third history refers to the ritual circle. The idea of Druids performing ceremony in circles comes from two sources; the first from Roman narratives, the second from antiquarians associating Druids with stone circles. As Druids stand within their ritual circles, there is an immediate recognition of tradition as prehistory is redefined and performed in the present. For modern Druids, a natural extension of this thinking is to build modern stone circles (the Welsh Gorsedd build a stone circle at each place they hold an Eisteddfod), or to claim responsibility for building them in the past. These historical appropriations empower the Druid's sense of self, and the ritual performance in the countryside becomes a pilgrimage to power - the knowledge of the past and the reality of culture.

Before the Winter ceremony began, an initiation for a new member was planned - I was witness to three of these rituals throughout my research. As the Grove Mother and the Chief finalised the ritual script in a warmly heated trailer, I searched, beneath the moon-lit sky, the frozen streams and frosty marsh for stones for the initiation. (I collected around twenty in all. These would be tipped over the neophytes back as she crouched on the ground beneath the Chief.) Theresa, Jo, Jerry and I prepared and

lit the bonfire in the centre of the circle as Idris brought in the waiting neophyte - the circle now complete. The Chief stood in the Eastern quarter of the circle, place of the Sparrow Hawk and Spring. As Grove Mother, Theresa took the West, the place of the ocean and Autumn. Jo (also a founding member of the Northern Grove) took the Northern quarter, place of stillness and the Winter's Mother. I accepted the Southern quarter, place of the Stag and the warmth of Summer.

Following the same ritual pattern I myself had experienced on Iona in 1989, the initiate, crouching in front of the Chief, was held firm by the Grove Mother. As a series of ritual questions was asked, the stones were tipped over her back. Jo and I moved forward from our positions in the circle, moving closer to enclose and protect the triad before us. As always, it all seemed so moving, the ritual tensions of expectation somehow resolving themselves as the company wept with the neophyte. If pilgrimage serves as the political expression of emerging culture, initiation, through its emotional meaning to those experiencing the act, ensures its continuation.

As the ceremony proceeded, I became aware that this initiation was also highly significant for the newly formed Brigante. As the young initiate stood to greet each of the ritual players, her symbolic rebirth mirrored the re-birth of the Brigante Grove. This theme of re-birth runs throughout the Winter solstice ceremony as the time of the year when the sun is re-born from the darkness of the season, and genderised as male or the *Mabinog*. The symbolism of re-birth was threefold, with the initiate serving as a bridge between the spiritual re-birth of the sun and year, and the physical manifestation of this re-birth in the new Grove. Indeed, the idea of a Winter ceremony is considered by many Pagans to pre-date Christianity as the true form of Christmas, and is therefore understood as a symbol of Christianity's cultural domination of Paganism (Lethbridge 1975: 120). The mere act of performing any kind of Winter solstice ceremony itself challenges Christianity, symbolically re-claiming the season and its spiritual meaning as Druidic.

The moon continued to rise and the stars turned in the sky (one notices the movements of the natural world more closely when one is standing in the cold for an hour or so), and another three members of the Grove joined the ceremonial proceedings. The solstice ceremony involved quite a lot of candles, all of which were extinguished in the ceremony to allow the darkness of the season to pass through the circle. The ever-present wind, blowing over the moor throughout the ceremony, had extinguished the night lights well before-hand, and when the time for the renewal of light came, the breeze dropped, and the candles were easily re-lit. As all eight companions stood motionless in the moment of the symbolic re-birth of the year, the moment seemed to permit a sense of ceremonial success. Retreating to a warm caravan, we disrobed and drove off in convoy to a centrally heated public house for food and drink.

The Northumbrian Grove.

I first met Jim and Elizabeth in May 1999 while attending the OBOD's pilgrimage to Iona. During my periods of self-consciousness amid intense ritual conversations within the small and intimate group,

they both cheered and supported me. In March 1999 I accepted an invitation from Jim and Elizabeth to their Spring equinox ceremony in the Northumbrian Grove.

Crossing the magnificent Tyne at Newcastle, and trying to ignore the grey suburbs of Gateshead, I buried my head in a newspaper review of the biography of Sylvia Plath. Waiting for the right moment, I emerged from the folded pages of Plath's suicidal life, greeted by the sight of green Northumbria. The land around Jim and Elizabeth's house is quite beautiful - grand views across the valley, and woodland paths winding down to waterfalls and rock pools. An ideal site for a Druid ceremony, set deep within nature, far from the depressions of Gateshead.

As the time for the ceremony drew closer, Jim informed me that I would be the only visitor participating in the ceremony. As a result, the ritual script had to be altered as there were not enough people to perform the characters. While I was happy to improvise with the group, I wondered why initiates with an affiliation with nature living in urban areas would miss the opportunity to travel into Northumbria. During an interview with Jim, I asked about the Grove members and their non-attendance.

PD. How many people usually come up here?

Jim. It depends. Sometimes no one comes around. Sometimes we have a ceremony with only the two of us, sometimes two or three visitors, and other times, as many as 20 visitors.

PD. And how many OBOD Druids are there living in this area?

J. Probably no more than 7. The rest are simply interested in Druidry or Paganism.

PD. Why do you think it is that 7 people in the Order do not feel the need to come to the Grove when Druidry is so intimately bound within nature?

J. There's an old adage, 'where is the centre of the world?', well, it's under your own two feet.

Jim's answer was perplexing. Instead of a ceremony with 20 people all interacting with nature and expressing their sense of culture through ritual, language and other ritual acts, there were two initiates and one academic Druid. I later learnt that two members from Newcastle were both experiencing problems in their personal lives, while other initiates had decided to form a splinter Grove based in the city. I strongly assume they would hold smaller rituals in a member's living room or garden, or would travel out to places in the country - this also being the pattern followed by initiates of the Order unaffiliated with Groves. There are, after all, 10000 men and women initiated into the Bardic Grade, with a minority of members active within Groves, many of which hold ceremonies with only handful of participants. Our equinox ceremony, Jim informed me, would be a simple affair, with the casting and

purification of the circle by Elizabeth and Jim, followed by a healing ceremony for Ann, a friend recently diagnosed terminally ill with cancer.

The ritual procession led from the house into a walled Victorian Garden full of herbs, rose bushes and fruit trees. At the bottom of the garden stood a small home-made stone circle beneath the branches of a mature ornamental beech tree acting, Elizabeth informed me, as a protective guardian to the circle. Facing the east, the two companions and myself saluted the Spirit of the East – the great hawk – and stood facing the centre of the circle. After the circle had been ritually blessed with incense and water, Jim lit a fire set within a deep pit in the centre of the circle. No one spoke, concentrating instead on the flaming pit and visualising the healing of their friend. Placing wood into the furnace, we stood for what seemed like 20 minutes peering into the white heat, visualising Anne strong and healthy. Then, as quickly as the ceremony had begun, the circle was closed and we walked indoors for wine and beer. Continuing the interview with Jim, I asked:

PD. Why is it important for you to perform your Druidry here in a natural environment in a stone circle, as opposed to performing ceremony indoors?

J. It's a personal thing, but for me, a house is a structure that excludes the influences of the sky, the stars, the planets and everything else. It's a big block. Performing ceremony outside, you're close to trees, close to the Earth, it's open to the sky and the influences of the planets and everything else. A house - it's a box, it's a bubble that's around you.

This ceremony seemed to me the simplest, and most compassionate, ritual I had attended for many years. Yet the performance also contained New Age elements familiar to the ceremonial structure of all OBOD ceremonies. First, the pre-liminal procession and the ritual opening of the circle, followed by a middle section open to inspired acts such as healing, dancing, meditation, followed by a closing rite and procession from the liminal to the post-liminal. For Jim and Elizabeth, the lack of ritual complexity in this ceremony did not detract from a post-liminal sense of ritual achievement - a strong feeling felt by all three of us. Jim's belief in the sacred nature of the outdoor site also indicated how nature is used as a depository for Druidic theology. Assisted through ritualised movements into nature, the emotional meaning of the performance in the post-liminal helped to convince this small Grove of the reality of Druidry and its theological ideas.

As the spirit of the circle is honoured upon entering the place, the ritual structure serves to 'lock in' the performance until the players have sufficiently expressed their beliefs, in this instance, the power of the spirit of place (nature as deity) as a force of healing. This ceremony may have been very private with little or no political intent, yet the existence of the site and an open-door policy to other initiates demonstrates the symbolic potential of such Groves to act as catalysts in the lives of other initiates. The power of this group lies in its capacity to nurture, develop and express an initiate's sense of culture through ritual movements and intimate activity within the circle. The act of acknowledging the spirit of

a place, and using this force as a power to effect change in the mundane world, becomes a metaphor for the power to know one's own potential culture in the world as a force with social consequences. The Grove, no matter how large or small, has a potential power to will culture into existence and therefore to have a place in the world. The process of journeying into the garden allow the ideas of Druidry to be fully expressed. Without the act, the process of cultural creativity and self-empowerment is incomplete. During the interview, Jim explained to me how the empowerment of group members is largely determined by his ability to offer a space for self-expression:

PD. What do you think are the needs of the people who come here for ceremony?

J. Some people come because we seriously acknowledge the seasons, and because we live in a fairly isolated area in which to do ceremonies, so I feel obliged to let ceremonies take place here.

Jim's obligation is to a collective group identity, the emergence of culture and to cultural assertion through ritual movements made between house and nature - the Druid's emplaced deity.

The British Druid Order.

Emma Restall Orr and Philip Shallcrass are the two Chief Druids of the British Druid Order. In the *Principles of Druidry* (1998), Restall Orr encourages the individual to seek their Druidic identity, ideally, in the wilds of nature far from the concrete of the houses and the city.

Wherever you find yourself is your own story. It may be on the open moors, with the buzz of bees in the heather and the wind chasing itself around your clothes. It may be the forest, with the twigs snapping beneath your feet, the smell of a leaf mould infusing through you. It may be in the park, beneath a willow at a pond's edge, the purring of pigeons lulling you, the city that holds you gently disappearing into calm... When you feel your presence has begun gently to merge with the environment through which you wonder, allow your mind to ponder upon your quest, your desire to know more about the old traditions of Druidry (ibid: 1-3).

Beyond the prose of this passage are clues to the ways in which the Druid (or an individual interested in Druidry) understands nature. The symbolisms of nature that become the object of the pilgrims quest are the very same ideals projected upon landscapes by Druids. Texts such as Restall Orr's define nature as an animate entity into which theology is then placed. Encouraged to see nature as a living deity capable of communication, the reader is directed into this landscape, becomes the pilgrim, and thereby expresses a Pagan identity. Again, we see how identity exists within the natural or semi-natural landscape as textual suggestion is transformed into informal collective beliefs. As the reader becomes pilgrim, identity transforms into an imagined sense of Druidic culture. This idea of culture is, then, as described below, fully embodied within the seeker through formal initiation.

Philip Shallcrass informed me, in an interview in his Sussex home, that the Druidry of the BDO differs from other Druid groups (and specifically, nationalist groups) due to a 'gutsier, earthier, bloodier, darker form of Paganism'. This earthy expression of Druidry is noticeable in Restall Orr's narration of a 13 year old adolescent's initiation into womanhood at her time of menarche:

Dipping her hand into the bowl, she brought out a [palm full] of mud that was thick and smooth as cream, and with it began to mark her body... "As spirit, I honour the spirit of my ancestors. As body, I honour their body through my bloodline and through my blood. This is my blood. It is not dirty, it is sacred". Only when her mother gasped, trying to hold back a sudden rush of tears, did she open her eyes (1998.i: 93-4).

The act of mixing blood and clay into a body paste allows the girl to embody nature as deity. At the moment of becoming a young woman, the blood and clay enable her to intimately know the ancestors that reside within the landscape. Through this initiation, the girl becomes, like the Earth Goddess, a sacred being. This belief in nature as deity, previously experienced through textual projections on to a landscape, are now ritually emplaced within the initiate's body. Hence the moving body of the initiate becomes the vehicle for maintaining cultural beliefs. Serving as depositories for identity, the landscape is mirrored within Druid. The multiple experiences of a pilgrim (theological belief, religious identity and ceremonial performance), are most intimate at the place where textual beliefs are emplaced. The ultimate act of pilgrimage is the multi-dimensional expression of the Druid in nature, the empowering of the self and, ultimately, the group, as the imagined sense of tradition is promoted within the rite.

Reflecting a reflexive relationship with society, dependence upon text and landscape defines the Druid. This cognitive process separates the Druid from the non-initiate unable to decipher the surrealism of belief. The bloody and earthy Druidry promoted by the two Chiefs Druids of the BDO separate their Order from the OBOD's textual discourse, that focuses upon attributes such as peace, love and light. The Brigante Grove, with its associations with both groups, attempt to bridge the space between these Orders, and the structural form of Druidic pilgrimage distinguishes Druidic culture from mainstream society. (Most people in society do not consider the Earth to be a Goddess, or their local landscape as a house of Celtic and pre-Celtic ancestors. Nor do they understand the ritual language of invocations used in ceremony). The whole act is separative, and an implied critique of the mainstream relationship with nature. This implied critique is most noticeable during the ritual protests of Druids and other Pagans during demonstrations to stop road by-pass schemes. During an interview in East Sussex, Philip Shallcrass explained his ideas concerning ritual and protest.

Philip Shallcrass. [Druidry] brings magic into the ecological movement. The view of the world as being imbued with spirit enables you to work with ecological issues on more than just the physical level... But beyond that you can also relate to the spirits of the land and the spirits of nature inhabiting the land. So if you go to a demo to try to stop a by-pass, the Druidic approach, or at least my Druidic

approach, would not be to get in a ruck with the security guards hired by the contractors. My approach would be to go to make ritual with the spirits of the place in that environment.

PD. ...Arthur Pendragon and Rolo Maughfling [COBDO] are politically active in their Druidry. Would your Druidry mirror, in some respect at least, the non-violent-direct activities of these Druids?

PS. It may look that way outwardly, but what we are doing is quite different. My approach is to make ritual and, as a by-product of that, to empower people who are there making the physical protest. But fundamentally, the core of the ritual is actually communication with the spirits of the place and the spirits of nature to find out how they feel - what's happening to them and how, on the level of spirit, we can actually work with and make things better for them.

PD. So you go to a demo and ask the spirits of the locality what they want? Is that right?

PS. That's the idea.

For Philip, ritual activity on political protests are, rather than forms of explicit radical expressions of belief, a form of human-nature co-operation. However, Philip's mere presence on such a demonstration indicates that behind the harmonious ritual intentions, implicit political meanings are at work. These political meanings serve as a force from which Druidic culture is asserted through ritual performances in contested arenas. From the space between the Druid's idea of self, and their wish to express this identity, is pilgrimage as a socio-political force.

Chapter 4. Pilgrimage as protest: King Arthur Pendragon.

I am a Druid, I am of the land, and I am a Pagan priest. I am not only a Druid King, but view myself as
the people's champion

(Interview with Arthur Pendragon, Vale of the White Horse, August 1999).

King Arthur Pendragon, the charismatic Chief Druid and driving force behind a group known as the Loyal Arthurian War Band, and Chair to the Council of British Druid Orders, believes himself to be the reincarnated figure of the mythical warrior King Arthur. Drawn from the Covens of Wicca and Groves of Druid Pagans that lie on the Pagan fringes of the New Age, Arthur's followers are often solitary practitioners of their crafts and seem to represent a broad mix of ideologists promoting the rights of Pagans to freely express their religious beliefs. Communicating such ideology through political activity in arenas such as Stonehenge and Seahenge (chapter five), Arthur and his Druid band are certainly the most formidable and assertive of political Pagan groups currently active upon the stage of modern Paganism. While many practitioners of Druidry, Wicca and Heathenism are politically active in terms of protecting the planet from the destructive activities of land developers, only Arthur has successfully drawn together so many individuals in a politically assertive fashion.

In order to understand and interpret Arthur's claim to be 'a modern king for modern people', we need to realise that Arthur's statement that he is the 'people's champion' simply means that he represents many Pagans concerned at the perceived threat to the planetary deity from land development schemes. In this way, the LAWB and COBDO are as politically explicit and socially contentious as they are religiously assertive.

John Timothy Rothwell (a once Hell's Angel biker, and member of MENSA) was formally crowned King Arthur on the coronation stone of the London's Kingston Zodiac, in January 1998.⁶ At the Summer solstice celebrations at Stonehenge in 2001, Arthur was 'baptised' into the collective Celtic faith. I remember meeting this born-again King at Avebury stone circle in 1994 when, as an initiate of the Order of Bards Ovates and Druids, I travelled to Wiltshire for a ceremony organised by the British Druid Order. My first clear memory of Arthur was the old Triumph motorbike and side-car he drove to the ceremony. The LAWB web site briefly describes the important turning point in Arthur's life and how, upon being involved in a 'train accident', he received 'enlightenment' and turned his attentions toward the realms of the esoteric and, later in his Druidic career, toward environmental protest (Hawley 2000 www.warband.org). Arthur's political Druidry can be contrasted to the radicalism of minority Pagan groups organised and led by the American Starhawk (1979, 1982) and Monica Sjoo (1992),

⁶ Modern myth states there are 12 zodiacs cut into the landscapes of England and Wales, known collectively as the Gypsy Switch. I am aware of three, the Glastonbury, Kingston and Durham zodiacs. The boundaries of these zodiacs are thought to be defined by ancient field boundaries and trackways.

whose politically focused Wicca (a form of modern Witchcraft) suggest ways in which feminism explicitly refers to personal politics and ecological responsibility (Adler 1986).⁷

Although Arthur's Druidry is purely ecological and not overtly feminist in its thinking (for Arthur's brand of Druidry draws upon well-established patriarchal images of Man the Warrior), there are, perhaps, traces of the Noble Ancient suggested by Aubrey and his predecessors (Piggott 1977: 130). However, this form of Noble Paganism does indeed serve to champion the Goddess and, like Pagan feminism, claims a cultural affinity with Her. Arthur's Druidry seems also to be a conscious move away from the New Age feminism often associated with modern Pagan thinking. This form of New Ageism, with its focus within the delicate spiritual reality of bluebell fairies with auras shining with light, is replaced with assertive warrior activity in landscapes that are clearly understood by these warriors as arenas of protest. These sacred theatres of Druidry are considered to be the sacred hearts of this living deity and the Goddess is certainly celebrated in these arenas, only for Arthur and his troupe. Her places of residence are sites to be protected from modern development.

Beneath the banner of the Council of British Druid Orders (chaired by Arthur), Chief Druids, such as Rolo of the Glastonbury Order of Druids, and Dylan of the Insular Order of Druids, lead their bands of male and female 'protestant priests' against social activities that may disturb the sacred places of the Goddess. Through the act of pilgrimage and ceremony, places considered sacred centres such as Avebury, Stonehenge and Seahenge are therefore re-claimed as Pagan and more specifically as Druidic. The serious nature of Arthur's activities are, of course, not understood by the New Age majority of Druids who often dismiss the activities of Arthur's Warband as disruptive to the ritual operations of less politically focused, feminist-friendly, Druid groups. Hence ritual celebrations of cyclic events held at sites contested by Druid groups manifest, on occasions, ritual-tensions and ill-feeling between groups with similar theological beliefs.

On a Druid chat-site on the world-wide-web, one initiate of an un-named group complained of the abrasive ritual-manner in which some initiates with close links to COBDO and Arthur walked into a Cornish stone circle to celebrate the 2000 total eclipse of the sun. This group of Druids, complained the individual, upset the fine balance of their own ritual proceedings. There are numerous other examples of such inter-group conflict, most notable of which are the ceremonies centred around Stonehenge at the Summer solstice. Arthur's promotion of non-violent direct activity at Neolithic sites is most clearly demonstrated as the LAWB empathise with, and actively respond to, groups involved in road by-pass protests, popular in the late 1990s.

Considering the political relationships with the Earth Goddess, it is safe to state that, for the LAWB, the countryside is worthy of protection simply because it is a part of Her living body. During an

⁷ Adler's anthropological survey of modern Paganism in the United States covers many forms of Pagan activity, including rituals bound within gender or ecological paradigms. The most explicit example I have encountered of politically focused Paganism is Starhawk's use of magic to defend the Earth from Nuclear

interview at an OBOD pilgrimage to the Uffington White Horse, Arthur explained to me how certain prehistoric sites are considered more sacred than others, owing to the level of ritual involvement at them over the millennia.

PD. Can you tell me why you consider the prehistoric landscape of the Vale of the White Horse to be sacred?

Arthur Pendragon. One could argue that anywhere is sacred, but specific places tend to be more sacred than others because more energy has gone into making them sacred and keeping them sacred.

Sacred places chosen by Arthur include locations such as Seahenge in Norfolk, and Stonehenge in Wiltshire, and serve as arenas where archaeologists, along with Heritage bodies, are forced to re-consider their roles as guardians of the countryside. Road by-pass demonstrations involving the proposed A303 diversion, the Birmingham northern relief road protest, and the Avon ring-road camp, serve to support environmental groups lobbying against the destruction of the natural environment. So, while the presence of environmentalists at road protests encourage a political re-consideration of governmental policies, the physical presence of Arthur's War Band and the Druid Council transforms these same arenas into theatres of socio-ritual conflict. Politically focused pilgrimages become the cutting edge of theological assertion as Druidry reveals itself to be both environmentally and spiritually relevant to the planet as a whole. The presence of Druids on road protests also indicates that modern Druids now represent the spiritual forces at work at these protests as opposed to other Pagan groups (Wiccans, Heathens and so on), who remain present, yet largely invisible as a group force throughout such events. Protesters politically confront government policies over land development, and Druids sacralise the event by projecting theological belief upon these same arenas. Hence, the protester makes a journey to confront, while the Druid also makes a journey into the sacred and living landscape.

Implicit politics of the OBOD and the explicit politics of the Loyal Arthurian War Band.

Drawing upon similar textual myth and history, the ceremonies performed within all Druidic pilgrimages follow the same ritual structure, claiming ownership of nature while also challenging social hierarchies. Pilgrimages therefore challenge the lifestyles of mainstream society, and use religious meaning as a vehicle for exploring alternative lifestyles. The LAWB's Druidry may be considered foreground political activity that is meant to be seen and communicated to non-initiates, while the politics of the OBOD remain hidden, and are publicly denied as having any political meaning. Within pilgrimages that seek to create a sense of unseen realities, their ideas remain hidden from mainstream society. Only an ecological awareness of the Goddess link the implied and explicit activities of these groups. Romantically expressed in ceremony, the OBOD's ideology remains focused within the poetic art of their rituals, while LAWB members assert their beliefs through more assertive, and on occasions,

Power stations, and other perceived forms of negative patriarchy. Starhawk's most popular text, *The Spiral Dance* (1979) preceded her more radical *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics* (1982).

confrontational activity. The quote from an interview with Philip and Stephanie Carr-Gomm (see page 26 of this thesis) indicates a political attitude that resonates throughout modern Druidry, reflecting the ambivalence felt toward modern urban society by many Pagans today (see also Adler 1986, Luhrmann 1992, Harvey 1997 et al).

Paradoxically, the alternative Druid is truly located within an ideal past that has no written history to draw upon, aside from a sense of what may (or may not) have occurred. From this sense of possibility all ceremony flows forth - the space between idea and its expression. Modern Druidry is not located in the future (although the present-day activities of Druidry serve to suggest, implicitly, possible futures); rather, it is located beyond a Christian (or environmentally destructive) present, and beyond all histories that refer to a dominant patriarchy. Hence Druidry reaches into a past that precedes the dominant mainstream. Foregoing the time of the Roman occupation of Britain, Druidry eventually traces its roots back to the unknown and unwritten pre-historic era. Here there is no evidence to challenge (or support) the idea of a Goddess-worshipping ideal, or the concept of 'Avalon on Earth'. Even the Dark Ages of the Arthurian age, so beloved by modern Druids, is a time when indigenous Druidism was syncretised after the coming of Joseph of Arimathea and the Grail to Glastonbury - owing perhaps to the invisibility of this cultural period in the historical record. Therefore, the Dark Ages cannot be considered by Druids as a time of its beginnings - rather, a time of Pagan-Christian co-operation or, depending upon the initiate's view of Christianity, a time of syncretic dominance by a foreign religion.

Druids of the open school reach beyond modern patriarchy (thought by many Druids to be represented by politics, education, economy and Christianity), looking toward an era of enlightenment - an ideal that existed before our present reality. With its roots firmly fixed partially in the antiquarian interests of Aubrey and Stukeley (both initiated Druids of the old school), Druid authors of the New Age suggest important relationships with the Neolithic, wherein the true interests of modern Druidry lie. For New Age Druids, the Neolithic seems not to be thought of as a time of taming nature through the religious or otherwise - rather the monumentality of the prehistoric seems to me a form of co-operative expression or a theological 'idea' - human co-operation with nature as deity.⁸ A few Druidic ceremonies I have attended also refer to proto-Druids as the hunter and gatherer people preceding the age of sedentary communities. Today's alternative is not simply a political solution to be found by contesting the present forces of society, but a process of simply imagining the future which turns out to be a blueprint of an imagined past. The act of believing in and performing belief in ceremonial situations, is considered to be a powerful enough invocatory tool, enabling the Druid to somehow effect social change in the world. Encountering the spirit of Druidry in nature seems to be a satisfactory act in itself that promotes, and sustains, their idea of culture through their invocations to deity. It seems to me that, in a world that is considered 'out of balance' with nature, the Druid's invocation to deity is an

⁸ See also Thomas 1991: 11-14 for a philosophic re-consideration of the idea of the prehistoric.

invocation to social revolution without having to actually participate in the radical act itself. For the Druid, the poetics of this passive revolution work to bring spiritual balance to the self.

The example below is from the OBOD's *Alban Arthuan* ceremony (Light of Arthur, or Winter solstice ceremony) and also refers to the Golden Age of the Neolithic. As the initiates stand within a makeshift stone circle, the disharmony of self is re-aligned with an idealised nature.

Ancient (or Chief Druid). Let us begin by giving peace to the quarters, for without peace can no work be. (*Moving to salute each direction in turn.*) Peace to the North (place of earth). Peace to the South (place of fire). Peace to the West (place of water). Peace to the East (place of air).

All answer. May there be peace and love and light throughout the whole world.

By stating the ritual intent for peace, initiates imagine themselves as a gateway through which light flows out toward the Northern quarter of the earth. In this particular ceremony the Earth is honoured as both male and female, although it is the exception rather than the rule for the Earth God to be invoked.

Scribe. Let us salute and lay our hands upon the sacred stone.

Ancient (*Proceeding to the West*). This I do to renew the covenant made between heaven and Earth. I revere my father and adore the spirit of supernal fatherhood. (*Other companions follow*). (*Water is brought to the Eastern side of the centrally placed mistletoe*).

Ancient (*laving*). This I do in reverence to my mother and adore the spirit of eternal motherhood. May our purification strengthen the springs of health. (*Other companions follow*). After re-connecting to the Earth as deity, the Ancient speaks to the youngest member of the group, explaining the Druid mysteries of the mistletoe and the oak.

Ancient. The mistle is the all-heal of discord whose life upon the oak is the sign of the Druid mystery... The Mistleberry is the reproducer of life in the moment, the Oak, figures the life eternity.

Invocation is therefore the Druid's way of inviting back the Goddess and therefore harmony - or of locating the spiritual-self within the miraculous deity of nature. Any response to society through political protest, or any other form of 'right-brained' thinking are not deemed Druidic, hence, the need to surrealise the mundane in order to refer to the ordinary in ritual situations. Mother and father are symbolised as a sacred stone - or bone of the body of the Earth as deity, and the mistletoe and oak are ritually united to bring eternal balance to inner and outer worlds. The whole process is an implied critique of society and its disconnection with the natural.

So the way forward for many Druids is not through confrontation or intellectualisation, for it is these very concepts that represent humanity's move away from nature and therefore the way of avoiding our true (feminine) selves. Many initiates of the OBOD consider the confrontational methods employed by Druid groups such as the LAWB as contradictory and self-defeating - at best they are considered well-meaning. For many members of the OBOD (and BDO), the political meanings of Druidry, if considered at all, remain a secondary force in pilgrimage. Beliefs promoted within the *Gwersu* act as a dividing line separating the non-politically minded Druid groups with a focus upon the artistic feminine (liminal), from more politically focused groups with their minds focused in socio-religious politics. The example of the invocation given above indicate the beautiful poetry often used to deny the power of politics as a relevant force in religion.

Political denial can be seen, more clearly, in the serial publications of the OBOD (the *Touchstone* newsletter), where the non-violent protests of Druid pilgrims are negated by columnists in favour of a less radical understanding of Druidry. The theme of a Druidic spirituality focused within emotion, art or poetic ritual running through the OBOD's *Gwersu*, ensures that analytical thinking, focused within the political, is negated as meaningful in any true sense.

Following the *Gwersu*'s implicit denial of the spiritual power of the political act, columnists writing to the OBOD's web site, or on Druidic e-mail discussion groups, refer to the assertive protestants of modern Druidry as lacking the spiritual fibre of true Druidism. Alongside the OBOD's refusal to accept explicit acts of ritual politics as Druidic, other forms of cognition demanding analysis and forethought are also dismissed. Throughout my 12 years spent as a Druid and researcher, I have encountered several leading figures within the Order openly dismissing higher education as a block to spiritual empathy. These criticisms extend beyond the analysis of the hard sciences (chemistry, mathematics, physics), and touch even the processual understandings of historians. Academia, like political thought and activity, is focused within the mundane, and the mundane is the arena lacking the spirituality of the Goddess. There are however, at least 4 university academics (including two doctors) involved with the OBOD. All of these individuals blend their ritual knowledge with their academic abilities, and amid a degree of suspicion from the non-academic community, focus their research and writing upon modern Paganism and Druidry.

It is therefore interesting to note that the main concerns of OBOD initiates I have heard voiced with regard to political protests refer to their confrontational attitude toward authority, along with the ceremonial practices of these groups in public arenas. Much of this criticism focuses upon the chaotic nature of their ceremonies - something openly encouraged in the ceremonies of these groups. While the ceremonies of the OBOD certainly have an element of spontaneity and surprise contained within them, spontaneity is usually 'reserved' for the central or closing parts of a ceremony where poetry is read, personal announcements stated, or unconventional invocations are made through theatrical prose or movement. Improvisation is therefore contained within a core part of their ceremonial structure, and dis-order is controlled. Other forms of improvisation within the ceremony adhere to the ritual script,

and are therefore alternative only in the sense that they deviate from the written script, yet refer to the expected ritual structure. The purification (or sacralisation) of the ritual circle with fire and water may extend to the Druid touching the foreheads of each companion, or seventh harmonies while chanting the Druidic Awen (ah-ooh-en). These improvisations are not, in any way, chaotic occurrences and are therefore permitted within public or private ceremony.

The willingness of the LAWB to move away from this formal structure within ceremony seems to upset many initiates of the OBOD with whom I have spoken. Perceiving these ceremonies to be disrespectful to the spirit of the place, and more to the point disruptive to other Druids who wish to make ceremony in the same arenas, strong arguments against the LAWB and COBDO's ritual process are passionately made. It is for this reason Arthur was himself, while giving a lecture on his Stonehenge protests at the OBOD's annual pilgrimage to Uffington, confronted with much scepticism from his small audience (see below). A LAWB ceremony I attended at Avebury involved the usual Druidic procession into the ritual circle, only this procession involved much more playful behaviour, with plenty of scope for humour and improvisation from start to finish. The ritual was certainly a move away from the well ordered New Age ceremonies of the OBOD, and involved more laughter than ceremonies I have attended as an initiate in the past. This sense of play contrasted with the more serious political nature of the LAWB's ritual activities at Stonehenge, or COBDO's activities at Seahenge.

Whether using chaotic ceremonial methods at Avebury, or political protests at Seahenge or Stonehenge, these ritual methodologies contradict those of the OBOD, and the reaction of many initiates is often one of perplexed disbelief. Throughout the duration of my fieldwork I discovered the ways in which the artistic ceremonies of the OBOD, and the more self-assertive activities of the LAWB and COBDO, are linked by a few initiates loyal to both groups. Many of Arthur's colleagues have their esoteric roots firmly within Druid groups such as the Order of Bards Ovates and Druids, along with much smaller groups such as the Glastonbury Order of Druids, the Cotswold Order of Druids, the Insular Order of Druids, and the Berengaria Order of Druids.

Below is a brief consideration of this group that stands on the periphery of modern Druidry, who seek, within their ritual practices, to express ideas that are drawn from both myth and history, as well as from the imagined future of science fantasy. These include science fiction television programmes such as Star Trek, and Stargate.

The Berengaria Order of Druidry have refined the imaginative process through which Pagan groups today claim identity. The traditionally accepted mythical histories drawn upon by mainstream Druidry (the Arthurian legends, and other folklore), are complemented by those of science fantasy. Legend can not be accurately defined, and are therefore ripe for the process of manipulation (see page 20 of this thesis). Like myth and history, science fiction is invented and applied by the Berengaria Order of Druids in the present. This process reverses mainstream trends that simply apply an imagined past into

the present without explicit reference to the future. The link between traditionally focused Druidry, and the Berengaria Order of Druids, is the imaginative processes of modern Druidry through which identity is formed, and one that both challenges, and also applies itself to, mainstream New Age Paganism (see also appendices 1 and 4).

Sarah's Druid group is affiliated to COBDO, and her concerns over the land development planned by EH around Stonehenge supports the work of the Council (see below). I have spoken to Sarah on several occasions at the quarterly meeting of COBDO, and while attending a pilgrimage to Stonehenge in June 2000. Appendix 4 offers clearer insights into the thinking processes that inspire Sarah's Druidry.

My pilgrimages to Glastonbury and Uffington revealed to me initiates whose affiliations with the OBOD bridge the divide between implicit and explicit political Orders. However, I would like to make clear that despite the few initiates I came across who share allegiances between the OBOD and LAWB, differences in ritual opinion remain evident. James Perfect's ethnographic study of the Order of Bards Ovates and Druids (1999) clearly states the difficulty that many members of this Druid group have with the assertive political sentiments of Arthur (Perfect 1999: 39). Perfect's thesis was quite correct in defining the OBOD's denial of radical politics as well as Arthur's assertive characteristics. This divide was clearly revealed to me one afternoon at the 1999 Uffington OBOD retreat.

During the OBOD's pilgrimage to the Vale of the White Horse, Arthur arrived at the camp site to promote his call for free access to Stonehenge. Philip Carr-Gomm kindly allowed Arthur to speak in place of a lecture and meditation he was to lead. In comparison with the session that Philip gave later that day, Arthur's lecture seemed poorly attended. Some of those who attended (around 30 in comparison to the 60 or so listening to Philip) questioned Arthur's forceful attitude, interpreting COBDO's involvement with Pagan protests as confrontational in opposition to Arthur's intended message of cultural assertion. I have not encountered any initiates who are members of the British Druid Order and also affiliated to the LAWB or COBDO, although I have met a few initiates who are members of the BDO and OBOD. This confirms my assumption that the ritual processes of the BDO are more in line with the OBOD than they are with explicit political activity. The consensus among the OBOD pilgrims on camp seemed to be one of the utmost respect for Arthur, overshadowed by a distrust of Arthur's politically focused ritual. In an attempt to understand more clearly the thinking behind the politics of pilgrimage, I will now examine the role of the LAWB and other member groups of the Council of British Druids Orders.

The Council of British Druid Orders.

By September 1999 I had, as an initiate of OBOD and an anthropologist, received an invitation to attend the first of three quarterly meetings of the Council of British Druid Orders - a Druid collective formed after the 1985 Stonehenge Battle of the Bean Field to address the issue of unrestricted access to

Stonehenge in 1989.⁹ King Arthur served as the Chair until September 2000, by which time COBDO had become involved in promoting modern Druidry to other non-Druid Pagans along with the Heritage bodies presiding over Neolithic sites. This they achieved through various corridors of communication including political pilgrimages involving non-violent direct-activity, ritual observances of Pagan festivals, and communications with Pagans and non-initiates via letter, telephone and e-mail. Communication of Arthur's ritual intentions of re-claiming such sites also reached mainstream society - mainly through the media coverage of conflicts at Stonehenge and Seahenge.

Travelling by train from Durham to Portsmouth, I arrived at the Froddington Arms public house where Druid Chiefs from seven groups of the open school gathered in the public bar. As a member of the Order of Bards Ovates and Druids, I was initially invited to represent the OBOD in the capacity as an observer with the permission of the Chief Druid of this group, Philip Carr-Gomm. My role was to report back to Philip as well as to collect data for my research although, admittedly, my interests in the proceedings remained academic. As I began collecting my research notes, my presence as both initiate and researcher created a feeling of double agency as the tensions between academy and group loyalty pervaded my experience of the meeting.

Strengthened by beer and wine, we moved from the public bar into an upstairs room and began the meeting. Each Druid Order formally introduced themselves. Arthur chaired the proceedings, introducing himself as Chief of the Loyal Arthurian War Band. Arthur claimed an associate membership of 15000 - an unknown percentage of whom had fallen 'beneath the sword' of Excalibur - the term meaning a formal (and brief) initiation into the group. Arthur's role in the Council consisted of organising agendas to be discussed at the quarterly meetings and working closely with the Liaison Officer Liz Murray, Chief Druid of two smaller orders, the London Druid Order and the Universal Order of Druids. Liz was also quite active in the initial years of Philip Carr-Gomm's chieftanship of the OBOD. Her work in COBDO seemed to mirror and support that of Arthur, as both individuals spent some of their time communicating with other groups or individuals, answering mail and telephone enquiries, and providing information concerning the Council to interested parties.

The promotion of COBDO's own brand of Druidry therefore occurs in three ways: firstly through communications with interested individuals making contact with COBDO; secondly through meetings with governmental bodies presiding over places deemed sacred (Stonehenge for example); and finally, through the planning and performance of ceremonies at sacred sites. In her capacity as Liaison Officer to the Council, Liz reported e-mail conversations between a Parisian professor and herself, also

⁹ The Conservative Government of the time decided to halt the annual procession of hippies to their Summer festival at Stonehenge. Via the national media, word spread of the planned restrictions, thereby attracting thousands of people protesting their right to attend their free festival. The ensuing chaos saw a long convoy of hippy travellers attempt to dodge the blockade set-up by the Wiltshire Police force (in full riot gear) by driving across a bean field. The reaction of the police was swift and violent. Hundreds of men, women and children were beaten and arrested, although no charges were made. The resulting publicity ensured that Druids were banned from holding their solstice ceremony - the high-point of the hippy drug festival.

informing the Council of another enquiry made by an individual from Brazil. These communications involved instructing the Brazilian gentleman of a forthcoming Druid Ceremony to be held for the Autumn equinox on Primrose Hill, London. I have attended, as an initiate of OBOD, three of these Primrose Hill ceremonies, all involving many groups from England, Eire and France. In this respect, these meetings mirror the collectively of COBDO, without an explicit emphasis on political assertiveness at Stonehenge rituals.

An Australian Druid had also made e-mail contact with Liz and, subsequently, Liz informed those present that information concerning COBDO and Australian Druidry had been shared. Dylan, of the Insular Order of Druids, informed the group that he had recently been contacted by Aran, an ex-politician from Transylvania, who had travelled to England to escape the communist regime. Aran wanted to know whether he would be welcome at the Primrose Hill ceremony on Sunday 19th September (the weekend closest to the ceremonial time of 21st). Arthur replied 'yes, the Primrose Hill event is a ceremony open to both Druids as well as interested individuals'. Dylan announced the beginning of the Virtual Druid Order (VDO), founded in August to coincide with the total eclipse of the sun in Cornwall. There is a link from this group's web site at, www.insular.demon.co.uk/vdo.htm.

Web-based chat sites such as those set-up by the OBOD (and the BDO) serve as places where ideas of identity are textually discussed, although inter-activity on all of these sites seems to encourage abundant amounts of inane humour, interspersed with critical reports of COBDO and the LAWB's ritual activity at ceremonial sites. In order to actively promote Druidry across the globe, the general response from the Council is to encourage lines of communication between Druid Orders of the Council.

My second invitation to the COBDO meetings took place in Cheltenham, in December 1999. Hosted by Veronica, Chief of the Cotswold Order of Druids, this meeting revealed how the concerns of the Council concerning human interaction with nature are not restricted to the activities of land developers, national heritage bodies or archaeologists - the three main groups active at Stonehenge. Later the same year, the Rollright Stones, a Neolithic stone circle in Oxfordshire, were placed on the open market by English Heritage. After a tireless campaign of fund-raising, the site was finally purchased by a group naming themselves the Rollright Trust. During this Council meeting, it transpired that the Rollright Trust were placing poison into the ground in order to deter a large number of moles from causing potential damage to this stone circle.¹⁰ Arthur suggested that a letter of protest be sent by the Council to the Rollright Trust. However sentimental this concern may seem, COBDO's communications with the Rollright Trust suggest the general respect for nature that many Druids today hold within religious ideals that act as a catalyst for COBDO's political pilgrimages. Matters relating to Stonehenge always

¹⁰ The presence of moles at the Rollright Stones had appeared as the surrounding land was cleared and ploughed for agricultural use. Thus, the grassy land of the stone circle was the only place left for moles to safely burrow.

play a major part in the Council's proceedings, and the role of Stonehenge Officer, given to the chief Druid of the Glastonbury Order Rolo Maughfling, is perhaps the most controversial title held by a Druid in Britain today.

Rolo's title of Arch-Druid of Stonehenge and Avebury (and all Britain) is hotly contested by many initiates of the OBOD which whom I have spoken. Their criticisms stem from the fact that some initiates of Orders such as the OBOD and British Druid Order do not wish to be represented by Rolo in the media circus they claim surrounds the activities of COBDO. Hence, these groups refuse to have any involvement with the Council. As a result of this on-going discord, the Council today represents only a part of the Druid community of Britain and Ireland, excluding two of the largest Orders of the open school in England today - the OBOD with over 10000 initiates, and the BDO with 2000 initiates and 1500 associate members. The title of Arch-Druid of Stonehenge, bestowed upon Rolo unanimously by the Council at its inception in 1989, is only invoked when Rolo speaks in a public capacity on behalf of the general Council. Examples of this include attending direct-actions at sites deemed sacred or in need of protection from land developers (for example, ceremonies held at road by-pass protests, debates concerning Seahenge at the University of East Anglia, or private meetings with English Heritage regarding the Summer solstice rituals at Stonehenge). Each COBDO meeting I attended gave at least half of the proceedings to matters concerning Stonehenge, indicating the general concerns and symbolic meaning of this site to the Council members today.

The A303 by-pass.

During the September meeting of 1999 chaired by Arthur, Rolo gave a brief report focusing upon the proposed road developments around the Stonehenge area, a designated World Heritage Site. Held in the nearby village of Amesbury, the meeting discussed English Heritage's proposal for a shallow 'cut and cover' tunnel to divert the A303 beneath the monument, thereby returning the surrounding landscape of the monument to its 'undeveloped' state. Rolo reported concerns focusing upon the tunnel's depth which require any such improvements to be carried out at a depth of 600 metres in order to insure that seismic vibrations from the tunnel's traffic will not damage the 'temple of Stonehenge'.

Arthur intervened, informing the Council of a London meeting he had attended with English Heritage and the Council of British Archaeology. This event also focused upon the proposed development around the Stonehenge landscape. Initially pro-EH, the CBA listened to evidence against the tunnel presented by speakers, leaving the meeting opposing the EH's proposed plan. The Council warmly greeted this news from Rolo and Arthur as a 'battle victorious'.

Local residents' concerns over the planned development of Stonehenge focused upon a landscape they clearly understood as belonging to them. Rolo stated that many local people around Amesbury village are in favour of a long bore tunnel, as a low-cost shallow tunnel would damage the site. Proving less intrusive upon the surrounding archaeology of barrows, monoliths and other monuments present within

the landscape, the long bore tunnel would be a safer, but more costly, option, for the developers. Hence, the Council is in a position to utilise local concerns over the plans of English Heritage for a short-bore tunnel in order to support the idea of Stonehenge as a sacred temple.

The Stonehenge Summer solstice campaign.

During the Cotswold meeting, Rolo addressed the Council informing the group of his discussions with English Heritage concerning the Council's wish to negotiate free access to Stonehenge over the period of the Summer solstice 2000. Rolo proposed free access to Stonehenge for travellers, Druids and celebrants of the millennium over a three-four day period from 19th June to 22nd June (an idea that Arthur had promoted to me during an interview at the OBOD's Uffington retreat in August 1999). By allowing enough time for people to arrive on the 19th, experience the sunrise on the 20th and disperse before the 22nd, the plan, suggested Rolo, could easily evolve into a situation where an entire week of Druidic activity was seen on Salisbury Plain. A partial consensus had been reached with English Heritage, although it remained unclear exactly what this consensus involved.

In the Spring of 2000, I spoke, by telephone, with an informant from EH who informed me that EH has no particular arrangements to speak with Druids alone. EH, he insisted, did not 'negotiate with Druids' over issues surrounding Stonehenge. However, a group called the Round Table, I was told, is a series of meetings attended by a diverse range of groups. These include the National Trust, local Police and residents around the Wiltshire plain area, Druid groups (some of which are affiliated to COBDO), the Stonehenge Campaign Group [representatives of the solstice festival revellers] and members of the New Age travelling community (pers comm.).

Having experienced over a decade of police violence and anarchist protest since 1985 (see also Bender 1995: 272), and the negative publicity subsequently reported on the pages and screens of the media, English Heritage's hesitancy over free access at June's Summer gathering seemed well founded. The resolution to such dis-harmony, believed Arthur, lay in re-opening the site to free access, thereby removing the reasons for the dissent around the time of the solstice: 'If there is no fence, no one's going to turn up and push it down... If you [English Heritage] said, "okay, you can come, we'll let you all in" the trouble makers won't turn up' (pers comm.). It seemed to me a logical argument, requiring a leap of faith for EH who seemed caught between a) police aggression, b) anarchist protesters, and c) the cultural requirements of various social and religious groups and their ritualised claims to this site (see also Chippendale 1990). Since 1985 Arthur has adamantly asserted his beliefs that the annual exclusion zone erected by the Wiltshire Constabulary on behalf of English Heritage should be contested, and his journeys to Stonehenge often involved arrest, imprisonment or both. For Arthur these journeys are, of course, religiously motivated, involving moving from a mundane space through landscapes considered sacred into Wiltshire and Stonehenge, the iconic heart of Arthur's spiritual beliefs. Arthur's pilgrimages to Stonehenge are fraught with confrontation as his War Band and COBDO 'fight' for the rights of Druids and Pagans alike to have access to their site at the time they

require it. Other Druid groups not affiliated to the Council also have a vested interest in Stonehenge. These claims represent an affinity with their own perceptions of their Druid selves - claims contested by the spokesperson for English Heritage. 'Druids' I was told, 'have no historical link with the Stones'. During an interview at Uffington, Arthur firmly contested this idea:

PD. As far as I am aware, there isn't a link between prehistoric Pagan activity and modern-day Druid activity.

Arthur Pendragon. Yes there is. There isn't a scientific link that you can make from an archaeological point of view, but what you can do is you can look at the stones and see why they were erected. The people that built the stones I call proto-Druids. They had to be practising the same religion. They wouldn't have called it Druidry, they wouldn't have called it Paganism... I actually think it would have been a more important gathering place at the Winter solstice than the Summer solstice, for the mere reason that that's when the cycle changes, and when the days get longer... The fact is they would have been there at the turning of the wheel [the seasonal turning of the year], and to me they were proto-Druids. They *had* to be - why would you build it if you weren't going to celebrate the reason it was built?

Although the spokesman from English Heritage denies any Druidic associations with this monument, he firmly voiced an appreciation of the spirituality of this Stonehenge. Referring to the 'unique and magical quality' surrounding the stones, my informant spoke of the ways in which aesthetics fuelled his appreciation of Stonehenge as a magical place, of 'the pale pink sun spreading light over the face of the monoliths one Winter solstice sunrise... a light scattering of snow [over the ground]...' 'Many people' he explained, 'are respectful of the site' (anonymous). As one would expect, 'many people' include other Druids I have spoken with. Philip Shallcrass (BDO), at his home in Sussex (February 2000) told me about his own pilgrimages around Britain:

PD. What physically distant sites (far away from your home) do you visit for ritual?

Philip Shallcrass. I presume you mean well known sites; Stonehenge, Avebury/West Kennet [long barrow] complex, Uffington/Wayland [Smithy chambered cairn] complex, the Ridgeway sites/trackway, the Thames and its birthing springs, circles on Dartmoor and Exmoor when I am close, Anglesey/Snowdonia circles and sites. Anywhere I travel through, I pay my respects [to the spirit of the place].

The imaginative ways through which my informant from English Heritage understands the 'deeper subtleties' of Neolithic aesthetics do not extend to accepting the cognitive and ritual processes through which modern Druids such as Arthur and Philip Shallcrass understand and ritually express their identity. Unlike Arthur's pilgrimages of protest, Philip's ritual associations with sites such as Stonehenge are not focused within explicit expressions of ownership. However, like my informant

from English Heritage, both Arthur and Philip draw upon meaningful relationships with the 'spirit of such places' and, through pilgrimage, respond accordingly. For Arthur, the spirit of place is championed through political confrontation with authority through acts of pilgrimage, while for Philip, a pilgrimage consists of ceremonial expressions that deny this explicit act. Both of these ritual journeys are also responses to the considered will of such places (their deities, and ancestors), for Druids do not simply choose to visit a site, they often respond to a feeling of being 'called' by the place itself. Hence explicit or implicit political statements are made - firstly through emotional relationships that respond to the spirit of place determining the ritual destination, and secondly, through the initiate's expression of such sentiment through ritual movement.

So, all Druid groups I have contact with (either intimately, as with the OBOD, or briefly in the meetings of COBDO and interviews with the BDO chief), define their sense of self through ritual journeys into sacred landscapes. However, as an assertive political force in society, Druids within the OBOD (the chief Druid and Scribe), along with the chief Druid of the BDO, negate the activities of COBDO. This manifests in a stated rejection of COBDO's given role to Rolo as Stonehenge Officer, and spokesperson on behalf of all Druids, and these groups refusal to part-take in the strategic operations of COBDO. The OBOD's and BDO's refusal to attend COBDO meetings and support this group's activities at sites such as Stonehenge is based, I have been informed by leading Druids within both the OBOD and BDO, upon the presumed authority of Rolo. The OBOD and BDO claim not to have 'any problems' with other attendants of COBDO, and both state a certain admiration for Arthur as a Druid. Despite these statements, it remains evident to me that Rolo's authority is given and sustained by COBDO and more importantly by Arthur as chair of this assembly. Rolo is an easy target owing to his forthright manner and visual presence in the media since he publicly claims authority in arenas that are often shared with many other Druid Orders not currently affiliated to COBDO.

All Druid Orders have a cultural interest in being able to have free access to Stonehenge around the solstice, yet several Druids of the OBOD and BDO suggested to me that, while COBDO's plan's were a good idea, English Heritage would never agree. They therefore favoured restricted access by Druids only - an idea abhorrent to Arthur.

Thomas Daffern, a representative for a small Druidic organisation known as the Truth and Reconciliation Council, negotiates free access to Stonehenge alongside COBDO and other interested parties at the English Heritage Round Table meetings. Arthur informed me that their theoretical purpose, to 'cut through and get to the root of problems at Stonehenge', works through the poetic roots of the medieval Bards of Wales. During COBDO's March 2000 meeting hosted by the newly formed Free Order of Druids in Hull, the Truth and Reconciliation Council supported Rolo's plan for a June 2000 Summer solstice gathering. However, Thomas also reported that an initiate of TRC felt that Druids were 'taking over' Stonehenge, and more specifically, felt that Rolo was 'shouting down other Pagans' who identify with and visit the site. Arthur's response was a swift defence of Rolo, stating that 'Pagans [non-Druids] have', in recent years, 'taken over Druidic sites'. Arthur's argument is clearly a

reiteration of his intention to re-appropriate sites he and many Druids feel were once pre-historically respected as Druidic (to use Arthur's terminology, proto-Druidic).

Arthur's statement that Pagans have taken over Druidic sites strongly indicates that the purpose of COBDO is to re-appropriate sites, not only from mainstream society, but also from other non-Druidic Pagan groups using sites such as Stonehenge. This is an important consideration in this thesis, as Arthur's explicit statement now has repercussions among more politically implicit groups such as the OBOD and BDO. My familiarity with initiates within OBOD, and with the chiefs of BDO, suggest to me that many of these individuals would not consider Druidic ceremonies at Neolithic temples to be acts of self-assertion over other groups using these sites. However, tensions enter into the ceremonial acts of pilgrims as these groups believe Druidry to represent a belief system that is indigenous to Britain. Druidry is considered by many initiates to precede Wicca, Heathens (thought to have arrived via migrations or warring parties from Northern Europe) and New Age Paganism with its roots in Classical deities of Greece and Rome. Mentioned in Welsh and Irish folklore, witches, are also present in folk-tales referring to Druids in contexts that may be considered malign. In these stories, Druids often counteract the power of witches by employing their own positive magical tricks. The message is clear; witches use magic negatively, and are generally subordinate to the good practices of Druids.

Sensitive to practitioners of Wicca, and eager not to appear to be the exclusive owners of sacred landscapes, initiates of the OBOD will state that Wiccans and Druids are brothers and sisters, and that each balances the other. Druidry, I have been informed on numerous occasions, performs its ceremonies 'in the eye of the sun' (genderised as male), while witches practice by the moon - the inference being that Druidry is more masculine than the Goddess-focused Wicca. This is not true, as many Wicca groups I have come across attract many men, and are indeed led by them, while their focus upon deity is not always feminine.

If anything, many Wiccans that I have spoken with over the last 12 years aim for a gender balance in celebrating both male and female Gods. The Druidry of the OBOD is certainly more Goddess focused (although the male aspect is also honoured in the form of the stag God, or Green Man of the forest, Merlin, or Arthur). Her name is not important in order for the initiate to know or have a sense of Her, but She is usually known as Annu or Brigit (both Irish), Ceredwen or Rhiannon (both Welsh) or Epona (French).

Hence, Druidic pilgrimage serves a dual purpose; a) to appropriate, from mainstream society, landscapes considered to be sacred places of the Druid's Goddess, and b) to re-assert, among the general Pagan community of England, the role of the Druid as guardian (or owners) of these sites. Statements of site ownership are clearly seen in other public ceremonies of various Druid groups. Since its inception in 1964, the OBOD has performed public ceremonies at places such as Tower Hill (Piggott 1977: 181), Glastonbury Tor and Parliament Hill (Nichols 1992: 161-163), with Tower Hill and Parliament Hill being, along with Stonehenge, the ritual haunt of the Ancient Druid Order. A clear

indicator of the changing public face of modern Druidry, the open Orders of Druidry have now moved into the ritual spaces once the sole domain of the ADO, a representative group of the closed school.

More recently, Neolithic sites such as Seahenge, and Stonehenge (along with Avebury) have become arenas where groups of New Age Pagans are now led in ceremony by initiates of COBDO, LAWB, OBOD or a group originally set-up by Philip Shallcrass of the BDO, the Bards of Caer Avebury. Ceremonies at these places are attended by a large numbers of Pagans, many of whom are Wiccan, yet are often led by a few charismatic leaders from one or more of the Druid groups named above. At the Stonehenge and Avebury ceremonies detailed above, with most people I questioned stating they were not a member of any Druid group (nor claiming associate membership), Druids represented a distinctive minority among the ceremonial companions. A Druid ceremony, it seems, need not be attended by a majority of initiates. On the contrary, a visual performance of ritual leadership is all that is required by a minority within a syncretic majority.

Throughout my research, I had a sense of Druids sharing their ceremonial arenas with many other Pagans - travellers, Wiccans, solitary magicians, adherents of the New Age and so on. Yet I only became fully aware of the importance of this syncretic mix at a later stage of my research as I began to realise, more fully, the importance of public ceremonies in shared arenas among Pagans of differing groups. The July 2001 Stonehenge ceremony, organised and led by Veronica, the Chief Druid of the Cotswold Order of Druids (a member group of COBDO), was attended by four other Druids from OBOD. While organising the ritual details prior to this evening ceremony, Veronica requested Hannah and Robert, members of OBOD's Bristol based Duboni Grove, to assist with the ceremonial performance - they happily obliged. My initial meeting (and ritual performances) with Hannah took place back in 1994 at the OBOD's initial Uffington camp organised by Philip of the OBOD - and again the year after. Each year, around one hundred initiates attend these retreats. Hannah and Robert also attended these camps, appearing briefly to offer short presentations on Druid history.

At the 1998 Glastonbury Camp, while delivering a presentation on King Arthur, Robert slowly changed his clothing into that of a Romano-British Celt, concluding his lecture by turning to the two leading Druids of the OBOD Duboni tribe present at the Camp to swear his allegiance to the Celtic Peoples of Bristol. As Robert knelt, Ian and Jane both stood and duly initiated Robert into this Bristol based OBOD Grove. At the Uffington camp in the Summer of 2000, Robert, while delivering his now customary lecture, publicly declared his love for Hannah. Of the four speeches I had the privilege of attending, this was, by far, the most romantic.

In the, now familiar, pre-liminal space of the Stonehenge car park, I asked the Druids I had travelled with 'how many of the 33 companions present are Druids?'. Despite their white Druid-style robes of the pilgrims, most stated they were from Wiccan covens. Thus the Druids' reclamation of sites such as Stonehenge, along with ritual statements of leadership among Pagans attending a Druid ceremony, reveal symbolic activities that are carried out, with the consent of the majority, by a small minority.

The whole process serves to reinforce the idea of Druids as spiritual guardians of such monuments - an idea reinforced through the appropriation of the site as Druidic as opposed to simply a prehistoric tourist attraction.

Similarly, the 'Druid ceremony' of Summer solstice held at both Stonehenge and Avebury attracted large numbers of Wiccans, Pagan-minded travellers and other New Agers. The June 2000 ceremonies at Stonehenge and Avebury certainly attracted fewer Druids than individuals from the general Pagan community, while the June 2001 Summer solstice event at Stonehenge, negotiated by Rolo and Arthur from COBDO, attracted numbers approaching 15000. Few of these were Druids, yet reports on the LAWB's web-site suggest that the Druids present responded to the syncretic nature of this event by leading the ceremonial proceedings - and thereby asserting self over both site and un-initiated. Carries de Fay, Scribe to the LAWB, described her experiences of the event for me in an e-mail:

King Arthur led a procession of Druids down from the car-park, and we were followed by the pilgrims. When EH let us in earlier than planned, Arthur whispered to us (Druids) to form an arch with our staffs. As the pilgrims passed through we greeted them and wished them a happy solstice. They did not have to go through the arch but a vast majority did, despite the fact that in some cases they had to queue for over an hour to do so and they could have easily walked straight in! This meant that by the time we were able to move, the Inner-Temple was completely filled - not that it seemed to matter to anyone present.... The atmosphere was wonderful, if I had to pick a single word to describe it, it would simply be happy. Despite the driving rain there was a loud cheer at the moment of the sunrise, although it was so cloudy there was nothing to be seen.

Chapter 5. Seahenge: a theatre of protest.

In 1999 English Heritage commissioned Norfolk Archaeological Trust to survey, excavate and remove a partially submerged henge monument of wooden timbers from the sand and clay loam off the North Norfolk coast. Situated at the end of the Peddars Way footpath between Hunstanton and Wells-Next-the-Sea, this recently discovered Bronze age site attracted the interest of Channel Four preparing to televise the archaeological excavation for a Time Team Special. Following professional advice warning that the henge was under threat from the ebb and flow of the Autumn tides, English Heritage made a decision to relocate, preserve and study the timbers at Flag Fen, Peterborough (Robinson 1999). Listening to later debates (see below), it seemed to me that local residents of Holme-Next-the-Sea viewed Seahenge as their own secret from the rest of Britain. For these local villagers, this monument invoked memories of their childhood play; a good site to bait Norfolk crab at low tide, or a place to court lovers among the ancient wooden timbers.

Threatened with the loss of their own past to the procedures of archaeological study, the decision by EH to remove Seahenge was soon contested by protests from local parishioners and other interested parties with a claim to Seahenge. Twelve New Age Pagans and Druids from Norfolk and the rest of England formed their own protest movement, and arriving at the site began to perform rituals in honour of the place, thereby reinforcing their own identities as modern Pagans. The Council of British Druid Orders sent Rolo Maughfling as a representative Druid to ritually re-claim Seahenge as a Druidic monument '[built] by the people - for the people', thereby representing the other Druids and Pagans gathering at the site. The protests of these pilgrims eventually lead to confrontations with the local Norfolk Constabulary. Subsequently, two Druid protesters found their physical movements in North Norfolk restricted. The law courts served injunctions upon them, along with John Doe - or persons unknown - a legal term referring to anyone the Norfolk Constabulary deem unsuitable to be present within the area of Seahenge for the duration of the excavations.

In April 1999, as the national press built upon local tabloid reports of the Seahenge project, members of Holme Parish Council formed the Friends of Seahenge committee inviting representatives from EH to their meetings. The New Agers echoed the objections of Friends of Seahenge, forming an unlikely partnership between Druid-led Pagans, hardened to political protest, and law abiding villagers living in rural anonymity. This formidable, if not always harmonious, alliance (local people tolerated these pilgrim protestants as they assisted in achieving their required goal), allowed locals and Pagans to challenge, not only the right of heritage bodies and their archaeologists to interfere in local and national perceptions of cultural identity, but also the cognitive processes of these groups. The whole episode of Seahenge tells the story of a 'battle' the people of Holme and Pagan Druids were to initially 'lose' as the planned excavation proceeded, only to see at a later date, English Heritage re-think their position and consider re-burying Seahenge at its original place of construction (see below). Here we clearly see, for the first time in an English public arena, EH and archaeologists losing their assumed authority over landscapes.

My own interest in the Seahenge debate came about quite accidentally. In June 1998, before I began my research at Durham, I stumbled across a report in Norfolk's Eastern Daily Press newspaper documenting the archaeological discovery of this site. Norfolk is not a county rich in pre-historic sites, and there are only a few recorded discoveries of prehistoric timber circles in England, Seahenge being one of two in Norfolk. The first henge is situated close to, and just south of Norwich, consisting of a barely visible ditch and bank. The whole area is surrounded by the outer ring-road and electricity pylons. I soon forgot the newspaper reports of Seahenge, only to be reminded of its anthropological importance later that Summer while conducting fieldwork with the Order of Bards Ovates and Druids in Oxfordshire.

My first conversations with Raven, a Druid of the OBOD and Shield Bearer of Arthur's LAWB, took place in 1998 at Spring pilgrimage near Glastonbury. The next Summer, during casual conversations at Uffington, Raven informed me of the ways in which the monument's wooden timbers and the uprooted oak stump known as the 'altar' inspired him to protest. Informing me of his own familiar relationships with the North Norfolk region, Raven explained to me during an interview of his spiritual feelings for this monument.

PD. I wondered why Seahenge, being a Bronze Age monument, is so important for you as a Druid.

Raven. For me as a Druid - you have [at Seahenge] an oak timbered circle, and obviously Druids have a very strong connection with the oak... My family, my ancestors also come from that point on the Anglia landscape... As we sit around this field today, I can see an oak tree. In fact all the trees are not expected to live as long as they used to and are actually dying off. From the root systems, the water table, all changing, over-development, pollution - all that - and an upside down oak tree [at Seahenge] showing its roots to us at this time when the oaks of East Anglia are dying off - [It's] the symbolic nature of it today really.

Raven's affiliation with the antiquity contained within the landscape of Norfolk combined with his concern for the relationships between the living landscape, and his own spirituality. Explaining his anxiety over the removal of a part of this landscape, Raven spoke of the ways in which Seahenge 'touched his heart' - implying the landscape of Norfolk around Holme was somehow embodied within him through the symbolisms of nature - the central altar, the oak posts, and the surrounding wildlife sanctuary. It seemed to me that for Raven, this feeling of belonging led to spiritual insights that further demand ritual activity bound within political protest. Searching for clearer insights, I continued to question Raven.

PD. In what way did this site actually touch your heart. You said that you felt as if couldn't leave, and then felt Seahenge touched the heart of the nation. How exactly was this experience for you - in terms of emotion and feeling?

Raven. Well on my first visit [to Seahenge], there was just myself. When I got to the site, there were three or four archaeologists. I asked them what their intentions were that day. They said they intended to remove (excavate the site) and I stated my objections - that I intended to stop that work. So I went into the circle, sat on the central oak and just tuned in really. I opened myself up to the energies - and to the circle. It's quite a subtle energy, and then - a real surge of energy came through me. I felt very strongly that I had much work to do.

Debating Seahenge.

Alongside newspaper and televised reports, the Seahenge debate was widely publicised in Druid and Pagan publications across England. The 1999 October edition of Touchstone, a newsletter available by subscription to initiates of the OBOD, documented reports of meetings held between EH, locals and Pagans, while November's edition of Pagan Dawn, a magazine for Pagans available from New Age shops, reported how English Heritage's chief archaeologist, David Miles, participated in a 'sharing circle' with eco-warriors, Pagans and tree-lovers. Along with representatives from the Council of British Druid Orders, the author reported how local activists opposed and disrupted the work until the Norfolk Constabulary served a court injunction upon the Pagan protesters.

Screened on 29th December 1999, Channel Four's Time Team Special, The Mystery of Sea Henge, ensured that the British public were introduced to the cultural conflicts centred around Seahenge, bringing sharply into the public focus the unsympathetic attitudes of the series' presenter Tony Robertson, the Norfolk Archaeological Trust and EH. Raven's statement that Seahenge 'touched the hearts of the nation' referred, I believe, to the adverse publicity the Time Team Special drew toward EH, along with media polls indicating the feelings of the public and how they were in favour of leaving the oak timbers of Seahenge in situ. At a public meeting held at the University of East Anglia on 11th March 2000 (Debating Seahenge), I listened to eight speakers openly criticise the role of English Heritage and Norfolk Archaeological Trust in their assumption of authority over Seahenge. Throughout these proceedings, I sat alongside the political pilgrim Druids, listening to speaker after speaker debating the issues surrounding the ownership of Seahenge. Anthony Hyams, a postgraduate at the UEA, stated how, in a television poll, 7000 calls were received from viewers who thought the oak timbers should not be removed. Shelly Walduck, a representative from Friends of Seahenge, reiterated how a poll organised by the EDP, and a poll in the Daily Telegraph showed that 6269 voted against removing the timbers, while only 420 preferred excavation.

After almost two years of resolutely asserting the need for the excavation and removal of the timbers from Holme, English Heritage reflected upon local and national feeling for the monument. Following emotional speeches from local protest committees, Pagan groups, and academics, Richard Morris, Chair of EH Ancient Monuments Advisory Committee, nervously took his turn at the rostrum, stating that 'if another [similar] situation arose, I think things would be done differently'. Acknowledging a culture of non-communication, he called for 'different ways of thinking'.

After the previous eight speakers had all delivered lectures criticising EH, Norfolk Archaeological Trust, and Channel Four's Time Team Crew, it must have been a difficult time for Richard Morris as he faced and accepted the criticisms shouted at him from floor (with the noted exception of an anonymous minority in the crowd). The result of Richard Morris's U-turn on EH policy over Seahenge was officially in print on January 2001, as the *Independent* newspaper ran the headline 'Seahenge will be reburied under the Norfolk Sands' (Connor 2001; 10). 'Norfolk County Council', reported Connor, 'is now working with English Heritage to devise a technical plan for the safe reburial of the 54 ancient timbers'. To date, the timbers remain in brine at Flag Fen, Peterborough.

Dr Robin Skeats (UEA) drew comparisons between the events at Seahenge and those occurring around the Summer solstice at Stonehenge. (Both sites are Bronze Age monuments, and EH are currently deciding how to approach excavations concerning excavation for a road by-pass). As speaker after speaker questioned the role of heritage bodies, agendas of public exclusion by these professional bodies, and the negation of local and Pagan perceptions of place, the floor united in the criticisms voiced by each of the eight speakers. When Buster Nolan, a charismatic and passionate Druid speaker, took the rostrum to explain the esoteric alignments of Seahenge and its importance in the wider landscape (Seahenge's relationships with local ley-lines, the Peddars Way, and monuments in Wiltshire connected by these ley/dragon lines), the floor erupted in wild applause, whistles and cheers. I looked around, surprised to see members of the public, along with many of the university lecturers and postgraduates present, enthusiastically joining in this unconventional behaviour. The Druids, like the Friends of Seahenge, were enjoying this, their moment of public and academic acceptance.

The agendas of FOS and COBDO were very similar, with both groups having their anxieties over the removal of Seahenge located within perceptions of place, and the identities focused within monumentality that provide physical substance for the cultural self. Seahenge exists as an idea in the minds of locals, and now, thanks to the media coverage, Pagans and the public nation-wide. For the parishioners of FOS, the protest seemed to act as a catalyst for the collective realisation of this cultural self. The same is true of local Pagans, represented on the day by COBDO's ritual re-clamation of the site as a place '[built] by the people - for the people'.

As the spiritual representative of all Druids and Pagans, the presence of Rolo extended a representative arm to encompassing the local villagers of North Norfolk. For this monument, according to Rolo, was built by the people, and Druids preside over the people and spirit of the place today. For Rolo and COBDO, the Seahenge protests, and subsequent debates of the site, all serve as arenas where Druidry not only asserts itself through ritual - pilgrimage into the sacred - but also as a useful tool for reminding villagers and the EH alike that the Seahenge monument is more than an archaeological monument or a symbol of local identity. For these protesting pilgrims, North Norfolk becomes another geographic spot on the map of England where a Pagan past has been forgotten and superseded by mainstream society, only to be re-invoked using, as a form, ritual acts as a political force.

The pilgrimage of protest documented above demonstrates how, for COBDO and many groups, the ritual intention of Druids at specific Prehistoric monuments is to make a claim to social landscapes considered sacred. However, the seasonal festivals, and general theology of New Age Paganism, are always acknowledged and incorporated into the political act by the Druids and other Pagans present. Emerging from the tension between idea and the expression of cultural values, pilgrimage, and public debate, emerge as phenomena empowering Druid groups in arenas currently claimed as aesthetic monuments governed by England's heritage bodies.

Below, I will demonstrate, more clearly, how pilgrims of the Order of Bards Ovates and Druids deny pilgrimage as a political act, rationalising their sacred theatre as a three-dimensional act of poetry.

Chapter 6. Pilgrimage to the White Horse: the denial of the political self.

In the Summer of 1994, in a farmer's field close to the Uffington White Horse, Oxfordshire, I attended, as an initiate, the first camping retreat (the Druid's prefer this term for these events) of the Order of Bards Ovates and Druids. Although the Glastonbury retreat has a Spring-time focus, the spiritual themes of all these retreats remain consistent - these being a ritual journey as a collective expression of belief. Druid's seldom use the phrase 'pilgrimage', yet their retreats (or experiences) are just that - ritual journeys into landscapes embodied through the ritual scripts of the *Gwersu*, and selected myth and history.

The experience seemed to combine the teachings of the Order - that of respecting, and living in harmony with, nature. Four years later, I made my third visit to this harvest celebration, this time as a postgraduate robed as a Druid. A train took me to Swindon where I picked-up a coach to the Farringdon village, deep within the Vale of the White Horse. A short bus journey delivered me to the farm entrance, where around 70 pilgrims gathered for 10 days of ritual theatre. Here I met a few of the initiates also present in 1994, along with pilgrims from an OBOD retreat I had attended at Glastonbury in February 1998.

However, tensions exist and lie between the academic analysis of this ethnography and my own Druidic understandings of the spiritual aspects of the retreat. The same seems to be true for Druids in the field as they apply their own spiritual understandings of the ritual proceedings with the knowledge that afterwards, most of these pilgrims will return to the mundane realm and perform ordinary tasks in the world that their Druidry questions. This fieldwork was therefore my return to familiar Druidic landscapes, accompanied by a feeling of unfamiliarity as I began to understand the complexities of fieldwork and the ever-present tensions between my self and the complex world of pilgrims as ritual companions/subjects of ethnography.

Instead of greeting pilgrims on an equal footing (as a Druid), I found the need to quickly identify those pilgrims who might accept and openly contribute to my research, avoiding those initiates who distrusted my presence as a researcher, and the process of academic analysis I represented. Worried that some pilgrims might not understand my own journey from Durham as a ritual journey itself (something that I considered as a preparation for the retreat as both academic and Druid), I focused upon a small group of companions who seemed to accept my persistent questions and note-taking. It seemed to me that my presence as a university graduate revealed to some pilgrims, thoughts that were external to the spirit (known as the Druidic Awen or spirit of inspiration) they sought to invoke within their sacred space of the retreat. These people resented my presence on camp as a stumbling block to their ritual processes requiring the mind to be clearly focused within the sacrality of nature. The group included a teacher from the West of England, a teacher from the Midlands, one journalist and one counsellor from the north-west, an anthropologist/Druid from Wales, one graduate and a postgraduate of music from Winchester, a New Age traveller originally from the south-east, an un-countable number

of natural healers, a theatre director from Bristol, at least four authors of New Age literature, two practising reflexologists and an acupuncturist from Cornwall and another from North America and so on.

The journey to theatre.

Familiar to me from previous retreats, the camp organisers (or Crew) provided a place for new arrivals such as myself to re-focus upon the sacred events ahead. I recognised Ian, Stuart and Raven from the Glastonbury camp, along with Angela, Christine, and Hannah. Members of the Crew seemed to represent the 'hippy' element of the camp. Seen by some as flamboyant, by others as exhibitionists, this close knit group provided the hard physical work required to set-up the field for the 100 expected pilgrims. All communal structures, outside hearths, firewood, and cooking facilities were set-up by this team, along with communal chores and daily camp meetings in one of the communal structures named the Sky Bender. Constructed from wooden branches partially covered by tarpaulins and sheets of waterproof materials, this structure is the largest confined place on site and had no roof. Hence, in the Summer heat, the Sky Bender proved to be the coolest place to meet - ideal for lectures, discussions, theatrical performances or ritual workshops (see below). The Crew were also 'visually present' on site in terms of energy and inspiration - providing, through their hard work, new ways to interact and express the spirituality of the collective group. Events such as walking on hot coals, or tracing a Grecian style labyrinth, were organised and led by Ian who also devised the plan for the whole site.

Using visual means as an expression of his Druidry, Ian, later that year, formed a new Druid Order named the Megalithic Order of Druids. Ian had previously created at least two stone circles in England, the first at the site of the Glastonbury Festival site in the King's Field (considered among the festival-goers to be the most spiritual place to camp when attending the festival). The second was a stone circle in the South Downs. I was later informed that some members of the Megalithic Order of Druids were also involved in re-constructing the ruins of a stone circle in Wales - monuments under the protection of the Secretary of State. Understood as places where the Goddess and ancestors reside, these prehistoric places are thought by many Druids to be the remnant monuments of a pre-Druidic people from whom today's nature-focused Druidry evolved. Hence the MOD serves to re-focus the ritual activities of Druids today within the idea of the Neolithic/Bronze age, creating new monuments for ritual, and , perhaps, new houses where the invoked spirit of today's Druidry can manifest.

Through this process of interpretation and construction, the idea of a nature-focused culture is invented in the present through imaginative processes also encouraged within OBOD's Bardic *Gwersu*. (*Gwers* 4 refers to the imagined inner-grove of the initiate where a stone circle, or a some other circular clearing provides space for inner-contemplation. Other Bardic references to stone include *Gwers* 8 referencing the Neolithic circles of Avebury, Stonehenge and Callernish, and *Gwers* 16 with stone material being used as a tool for healing.) Inspired by literature, the imagination of the OBOD initiate serves as the vehicle through which Druids understand their identity and assert their culture upon

landscapes that are understood, but not formally claimed, as Druidic. The construction of camping sites or new stone circles completes this process and pilgrims arrive as pilgrims at these newly formed centres to collectively express their culture.

The idea of the Neolithic link with modern Druidry is evoked in various other *Gwersu* - most noticeably by the writings of Nuinn (the founding member of the OBOD). In *Gwers* 8, he discusses the idea of the Neolithic as nature-based, and their ideas of time as cyclic and non-lineal (Bardic *Gwers* 26, cf. Perfect 1999). Yet the clearest link between Druidry and an imagined past can be seen in the Druidic symbol of the Awen, or three rays of sunlight (/\) representative of three monoliths sometimes found on the eastern side of Neolithic stone circles such as the Merry Maidens in Cornwall, or Stonehenge. This link with the Neolithic seems to be one of the defining differences separating Druidry from other Pagan groups active today (Wicca or Odinist), and a theme present among all of the Druid groups I have come into contact with. These include the AOD, OBOD, BDO, LAWB, and member groups of COBDO and various groups attending the annually held Stonehenge or Parliament Hill Summer ceremonies, London.

At Uffington, beneath the figure of the White Horse cut into the prehistoric landscape of the valley, Ian led the daily circle dance, allowing initiates to meditate, through movement, upon the natural world around them. During the first of these morning circle dances, Ian explained to the dancers standing around the central camp fire his system of improvisation (or divine inspiration) - how he had placed structures in specific places in order to create a sacred space. The central camp-fire, explained Ian, acted as the heart of this site - a corridor where the invoked inspiration of the Druid spirit could more easily enter the site. This idea links with the OBOD's *Gwersu*, documenting a pillar of light (Craeb), linking the spiritual heavens with the solidity of our realm. The eight-pointed geometric star used by Ian helped create a sacred landscape temporarily separating the place from the mundane world. Ian's skills seem located within a three-dimensional expression of religious beliefs. These expressions forming what Turner would name socio-ritual theatre (Turner 1979), where ideas pertaining to ideology, as a political critique of mainstream society, are collectively 'played out' upon the social stage of an artificially created liminal zone, separated from the real world by artificial boundaries and ritualised behaviour.

Each morning, camp meetings are held in the open-topped 'sky-bender'. Two other communal benders provide people with spaces to associate, sleep, and for children to play, while a healing tent provides herbal and homeopathic remedies, reflexology and various forms of spiritual healing throughout the day. My main contribution to the camp included giving around 25 reflexology treatments over a period of ten days - a skill that I focused upon as a part of my studies in the Ovate Grade. Other people also chose alternative forms of natural healing to complement their study. (The OBOD promote the Ovate Grade as an opportunity to study and, if the initiate chooses, develop their skills as natural healers.) Showers and lavatories were also communal, while a children's bender and a mud pit provided a space

for children to play. Co-ordinated by Mary and Jay, communal meals were prepared by volunteers, and collectively consumed around the central fire.

The different styles of personal attire, living quarters (communal benders and tents) and ritual activities being planned by the Crew, help persuade new arrivals that they were indeed entering a place where the sacred realms of the Druid's otherworld were manifest. The emotional impact upon the initiate of entering a place where the theology and meditative exercises of the *Gwersu* are made manifest, suggest to the pilgrim that the camping area is indeed a gateway created especially to let the celebrated spirits of Druidry unite with the physical selves of the surrounding landscape. As the pilgrim travels into these landscapes, they become one with text, one with the land, and therefore the invoked spirit of place. The whole feeling was one of a colourful and creative ritual theatre.

The pilgrims had memorised by heart the theology set in print within the ODOD's *Gwersu*, and the Crew had prepared the stage for these ritual players to perform their drama. As the actors arrived, the play began, and the process of appropriating the sleepy backwaters of this Oxfordshire landscape was fully realised in the apparent world. Hence, this self-created reality became a place for initiates to focus upon, and their pilgrimage could be seen as a creative, imaginative and emotionally meaningful performance devoid of political meaning. Despite the absence of political conversation by the pilgrims, their contestation of mainstream society was clearly evident in their re-evaluation of mainstream concepts of being, represented through the alternative space before the pilgrims: The ritual plays of the OBOD are focused within seeking harmony with nature as deity, and political meanings remain inferred, and a phenomenon of the mundane.

Locating the communal sleeping quarters, I unpacked, and introduced myself to Druids around the nearest hearth where kettles boiled furiously. Here, I met Mary - a Druid I had first met at the Imbolc camp in February 1998. I also met Jen, a postgraduate from Lampeter, along with Barry whose initiation I had attended at Imbolc in 1998. Together, we set about constructing the sweat lodge (a ritual space using heat as a form of purification), fixing the old carpets and tarpaulins to an infrastructure of tree branches with climbing ropes and string. The whole experience of these familiar greetings served to create, and maintain, my own sense of identity with initiates of the group I had met previously. Other communal events I experienced included camp meetings where the day's tasks would be shared-out, and a men-only meeting where ideas pertaining to masculinity and Druidry were discussed. During these meetings, I also experienced a strong sense of community or *communitas* (Turner 1979), although some concerns were raised by a few members of the group as they questioned the need for separatist movements within a retreat where group unity was the main concern. I later learned that sharing circles such as these occasionally cause friction within the camps. One example was given where, at a previous retreat near Glastonbury, initiates, owing to their inabilities as professional counsellors, were unable to successfully assist a woman speaking about her personal problems. While this was only one incident, the group's failure to assist the initiate reflected upon the camp, and indeed, upon the whole ethos of the OBOD's Druidry. Speaking openly about one's inner turmoil is considered, within the

ritual spaces of the OBOD, an important psychoanalytical tool to self-development - the whole process encouraging the individual to 'know' themselves more fully. Owing, perhaps, to the ethical considerations of individual and group confidentiality, detailed information concerning the intimacies of this event proved difficult to obtain. Nevertheless, this event reflected upon the meetings of the male and female group. Other initiates not taking part in either of these groups believed the group focus of this particular retreat should avoid mistakes made in the past. The focus of this particular retreat therefore remained upon group celebration and ritual theatre.

The theatre of contention.

On a retreat such as Uffington, each day begins with a wake-up call at 7.00am. Around 7.30am a group of around 30 people gather for the Navaho Indian Dance of Life (or sun dance). Performing the movements of this dance serves as a statement of affinity with the Navaho people. As Ian demonstrated the movements of the dance, he explained to the gathered troupe how it had been devised, and subsequently shared, by the Navaho people when they realised the arrival of white European people meant their permanent displacement from their homeland. The teachings of the tribe, explained Ian, were encapsulated within the movements. Hence, to partake in the sun dance (and chant the accompanying Navaho language) is to discover a sense, through the movement and bodily sensation of the initiate, of the spiritual dynamics of a foreign culture - its music, language, theology and so on.

Participation in this circle is also a critique of Western cultural imperialism, as well as being an attempt to access and manipulate another culture's spirituality through New Age concepts of being, loosely bound within concepts of a 'world village' devoid of cultural domination. Every morning, the dance was successfully completed and the dancers experienced and communicated the sense of beauty and peace contained within the form. In a lecture given later that week, Caitlin Matthews, a famous author of New Age Pagan literature, summed-up the often un-stated purpose of dances familiar in modern Druidic ritual: 'Our life' she explained, 'is our dance - our connection to the threshold [the space between the physical and spiritual]'. Following Ian's swan-like movements, I began to remember the choreographed routine as memories of taking part in this dance at the 1998 Glastonbury camp came back to me. The ritual intentions of the dance, explained Ian, served to bring the spirit of peace and healing into the circle. The invoked energies within the circle are then projected outwards into the world through the movements of the dancers. For the Druid, the liminal space between the physical and spiritual realms permit the imaginative process of expression to manifest - in this example, as a ritual dance.

After the Dance of Life, some pilgrims took part in 'Beating the Bounds' of the field. This act seemed to define the boundaries between the sacred and the mundane, while also serving several contradictory purposes. Within the act of defining space, individuals informed me that walking around the field, banging drums, blowing whistles and chanting improvised songs served to: 1) drive away unwelcome spirits; 2) welcome friendly spirits in; 3) simply attune to nature through ritual movement; and, finally,

to 'wake the trees and hedge spirits' from their sleep. For me, the main purpose of Beating the Bounds seem to assist in forming closer bonds between those participating in this rite. This act helps to separate the camp site from the ordinary world in a very practical way, and invoking each quarter through invocation, music and drumming, sacralise the whole space of the camping field. After each quarter has been invoked, the participants move into the centre of their re-inforced liminal space, spiralling their music up, toward the sky as a prayer to the Druidic spirit of inspiration.

The sense of play, created by performances such as the Dance of Life, Beating of the Bounds (or maybe dancing naked beneath a full-moon), all relate to the initiates' intentions of invoking the inspiration of the Druidic Awen during the retreat. Movement serves to express the alternative ideas of Druidry, as a way in which it contends the mainstream. Dance is therefore suggestive of spiritual revolution, or social evolution, within its artistic or anarchic form (McDougal 2000). The sense of elation, often expressed by pilgrims living and acting out their beliefs, can be understood politically as a shared sense that, as pilgrims, their presence and ceremony serve as a real alternative to the profanity of the secular world.

Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1984) study of the selective processes of invention clearly demonstrates how culture exists in the present through the process of drawing upon a sense of its own past (ibid: 43-100). Extending Hobsbawm and Rangers' ideas of history, Paul Connerton (1989) suggests how such memories are contained within the body of the constructed self, with urban architecture also serving as the collective visual containers of such phenomena. The temporary community of the Druids is made manifest at camps such as Uffington where personal attire and living spaces reflect the imagined sense of self within rural landscapes transformed, not by physical means such as urban construction, but through ideas projected upon them from texts such as the *Gwersu*. Druidic identity is therefore a selectively invoked 'imaginative memory' through which Druids know their own place in the world, and create their own sense of identity (Remensnyder 1995) - a process of an imagination drawn from text and manifest in the Druid's retreats.

The 'imaginings' of Remensnyder's self-chosen identity, and the ways in which associated histories are skilfully expressed in contemporary arenas, are best understood through looking at (and participating in) the activities of newly emerging cultures such as modern-day Druidry. Incomplete sketches of a flexible past are available in the same way that brief glimpses of other cultures are made accessible beneath the broad, all-encompassing, umbrella of the New Age. This can be seen amid the New Age bookshops' array of Arthurian literature, nestled between other literature discussing Navaho, Buddhist or Wiccan ideas of spirituality. The imagined past, and the semi-available knowledge of other cultures in the present, provide enough information to inspire the individual imagination. Authors of texts referring to Druidry (Matthews 1989 and 1990, Carr-Gomm 1991, Harvey 1997) are able to take these snippets of data, and through poetical forms of theatre, transform ideas within them into a cultural collage asserting a sense of self.

Pilgrimage becomes the form through which Druidic culture emerges from such semi-constructed ideas of the self. The Buddhists' improvement of the inner-self, and the Native American or Wiccan ideas pertaining toward caring for and healing the Earth, are incorporated into the theatres of Druidry in arenas where ideas of history (and prehistory) are re-interpreted. The act of moving into a sacred landscape brings to life, for the initiate, these ideas. The Earth deity is honoured through these ritual journeys, and the Druid considers themselves to be guardians of nature. The ideas of self-improvement arise as the focus of thought turns from the mundane toward the deity that calls the pilgrim. For the Druid, the journey is an answer to a call - the call of the Earth Goddess. Drawn from text, the identity contained within such texts are simply applied to the landscape in which the initiate resides. The meaning of the pilgrimage to Glastonbury or Stonehenge is one of self expression - a formal and defining moment of culture. The Druid's acknowledgement of history, and of the Earth as deity, are seen together in the Druid's ritual of burning the Wicker Man and are discussed below.

The examples I have given of ritual drama as a form of appropriating the culture of others (the Navaho Dance of Life), and making claim to the landscapes in which these plays take place (Beating the Bounds), seem to fade into an insignificant background when compared to the larger, more spectacular, ceremonies held at this retreat. These include a ceremony to prepare for the coming eclipse of the sun later in October (and the promise of new beginnings symbolised by the sun emerging from behind the shadow of the moon), the harvest ceremony of Lughnasadh, and the re-enacted myth of Ceredwen's Cauldron of re-birth (see Squire 1975, or Graves 1988). However, a series of three fire rituals also caught the imagination of many of the 100 initiates present: the burning of a 25-foot-high effigy of a wicker-man; a walk through a large burning Grecian labyrinth; and a 'fire-walk' over hot coals. First, the wicker-man had to be built - a task presided over by Keith, describing himself as a scientist and a Druid. Keith enjoyed blending his scientific knowledge of physics with esoteric politics - one of the few OBOD members willing to contemplate science as a theme for spirituality. Around the hearth in front of the kitchen bender, waiting for the kettle to boil, our conversation turned toward concepts of deity.

God, explained Keith, is like hydrogen. Everything is made of it - hydrogen was even present at the time of the big bang. Moving quickly onto ecological politics of capitalism, Keith drew upon his 'belief in hydrogen' as a tool for his, and many other Druids', critique of mainstream society. As eco-warriors, he calmly explained, we are fighting a war that people are unaware of. The petro-chemical industry is one of greed, hazardous waste and pollution that assists in the destruction of the planet. I soon realised that Keith, a highly intelligent politician of the Druid Grade, was quite serious in his theological contemplations. The kettle boiled and I retreated to the communal bender to make notes and reflect on Keith's ideas of a chemical God.

The next occasion I met Keith, a small group of Druids took turns in preparing for a ceremony to be held the following Saturday night. In a secluded copse on the edge of the camping field, Keith instructed the small team of initiates helping with his master creation - a collection of branches and

twigs woven together in the form of a giant man. Aptly named 'the Wicker Man' after Pliny's descriptions of a brutal ceremony involving unwilling human sacrifice (an account contested by many modern Pagans as misinformed or simply fictitious), this ceremony proved an unusual, and highly visual event, evoking the memory of pre-Christian fertility rites that serve to contest Roman stereotypes of the cruel Druid. As an initiate, I understood the symbolism of the Wicker Man to represent the spirit of the harvest - culled to sustain human life, represented as such by the wooden image. Keith explained the fire-ritual as, 'our way of giving energy to the land as a gift from the heart'. The ritual is Keith's way of acknowledging nature while also drawing upon history as a tool permitting the act.

The preparations for the burning of the Wicker Man continued over the course of the next few days, with the figure finally being carried from the copse and erected amid a pile of petrol soaked logs. On the Saturday afternoon, Raven and a few Druids dragged the effigy from the copse to its place in the open field. They now needed assistance in raising the great figure in order to tether him to the ground using guy ropes. Chanting over and over the words 'Wicker Man', this beautiful song drew a small crowd of initiates from the camp. The scene was now set; ancient Roman narratives had been successfully re-claimed and converted from text to action. One by one, the Druids walked back down the hill to the camp to prepare for an evening of ceremony.

Latecomers arrived for the highlight of the harvest retreat, the ceremony of Lughnasadh, and the camp swelled in numbers from 60 to 100. Half of those present gathered in their ritual robes around the central fire. Some wore white (the colour described in Roman texts), while others preferred their own, everyday style of clothing. At each quarter of the circle, four initiates in animal masks stood to invoke the elements of earth, air, fire and water, as two Druids purified the central space and the gathered companions with fire and water. The spirit of the camp was formally acknowledged when Raven invoked the presence of the Irish sun God, Lugh, whose name is given to this ceremony, Lughnasadh. Philip, the chief Druid, danced around the circle performing the role of the Green Man - the God of the green forest.

Sheila, a former student of social anthropology, led a ritual workshop in order to plan and rehearse the ceremony. This workshop had to include the numerous Bards, Ovates and Druids present at camp (all at varying levels of learning in their Druid studies), and Sheila needed to communicate the ritual theme of the harvest ceremony, with its focus on the natural world of the Earth as a living deity. The resulting performance included all the expected forms present within the text of the *Gwersu*: the casting and blessing of the ritual space with fire and water; the invocation to the four elements of earth, air, fire and water; along with the inspired suggestions of initiates present at Sheila's planning group.

Marilda and Nicco, a couple visiting from France, were joined in wedlock, while the local farmer who allowed the retreat to take place on his land, was presented with a shaft of wheat from his field. Mothers and babies were formally acknowledged and celebrated - the children given corn dollies made earlier that day. Many other Druids, dressed as animals, Earth spirits or the white horse of Uffington,

all danced to the rhythms played by various companions drumming. Each person standing within the circle received a night-light lit from a flame from the central fire, along with a single branch of wood for the burning of the Wicker Man. These sticks represent private wishes and prayers to be placed at the feet of the wooden figure - a ritual act familiar in many large Druid ceremonies I have attended over the years, including the Autumn equinox, Samhuine and Winter solstice. By giving the prayer stick to the wooden effigy, an economy of exchange occurs as the wishes of the Druid are exchanged for favours, healing and so on.

As the Lughnasadh ceremony came to a close and the ceremony was declared 'closed in the apparent world', the ritual performance continued further afield. Philip, masked as the Green Man, led the 100 ritual companions in a procession from the circle and up the hill toward the towering figure of the Wicker Man on the hill above the camp. One by one, the ritual players followed the strange masked figure and snaked their way in single file around the tents and benders up the hill where the tethered effigy of the Wicker Man stood waiting. The night was kind, and not even a whisper of a breeze was to be felt. Drums played an expectant rhythm as we all encircled the giant, another Druid playing a rhythmic digeradoo.

As we all neared the giant, Raven led a second chant to the Wicker Man. Some of the companions joined in, mimicking the prayer with simple harmonies. After the gathered troupe had circled the figure (to symbolise the path of the sun around the Earth), the circle came to rest and the 100 Druids present now motionless and silent around the waiting figure. Stepping forward, each person carefully placed their wooden offerings at the feet of the tethered figure - private thoughts given only to the spirit of the night. Pirouetting dancers entered the centre of the circle clad in leather bikinis, some bare breasted, breathing fire and twirling leather thongs with fires at the end. As the last of the offerings were placed by the Wicker Man, the drummers and dancers gathered in a semi-circle within the main circle. After a short time, the dance died down, and Keith took a torch to where everyone had placed their sticks. The corpse burnt, illuminating the clear night sky - the stars indistinguishable from the glowing sparks rising into the air. Once more, the music began. The more intense the flames, the greater the excitement of the crowd - the singing and dancing responding accordingly. The corpse burnt.

Then one by one, in groups or couples, the initiates made their way back down the hill to re-stoke their hearths and kettles. Various forms of music filled the air that night - jazz, drumming, or gentle chants, while some sat and chatted idly until the early hours of the morning. Everyone seemed satisfied, and prepared for their journey home the next morning.

Ever-present throughout the Lughnasadh and Wicker Man ceremonies, the inner-tensions of participant observation hampered my experience and enjoyment of these ritual performances as a past initiate. My awareness of the historical roots of the Lughnasadh ceremony drawing upon southern Irish deities mentioned in folklore (Squire 1975), of Caesar and Pliny's accounts of the Wicker Man ceremony, and the sense of socio-ritual theatre created by this pilgrimage of historical syncretism, occupied my

mind to such a degree, I felt unable to fully participate in the proceedings. Observing the drama of historical re-creation and the appropriation of this imagined past in the present, rather than participating fully as a member of the sacred celebration, the sense that I was indeed a part of this spectacular event eluded my own experience. Cyclic time, located in the present, can only be fully entered into when linear time is denied. I could only begin to feel the 'magic' of the Lughnasadh ceremony when I ceased analysing the ways in which these rituals are constructed. Indeed, Druids truly feel themselves to be spiritual through the act of negating lineal time and mainstream understandings of history. By denying the mundane, the Druid attempts to somehow re-sacralise that which society neglects - the true and sacred nature of the timeless, and ever-present self. During an interview, James described this Pagan concept of time and the embodiment of self within this idea of timelessness.

PD. What's special about this landscape?

Jen. Well, if you're looking at it from history's point of view, you've got the White Horse, Wayland Smithy, and you've got a hill fort just up the road. It's an area that has continuity of use, and that continuity is something that Druids reach back to - to reach that inspired state that we perceive our ancestors to have had and has probably been lost over the intervening period of time. This site has also been used for a certain number of years for the Druid camps, so there's a short term historical pretext there as well... People have been meeting here to celebrate community.

PD. In what other ways are people here relating to a sense of history?

Jen. I think that many Druids feel a sense of dissatisfaction with monotheistic culture and the fact that it's got a linear progression in time - a certain set view of space where there's no divinity inherent in the landscape... It's difficult to explain because it's a part of the mystery of Druidry - the idea that as people, and as a community, we're all inherently linked with the land. If the land falls apart, then sooner or later, we're gonna fall apart because we depend upon the land for existence.

A constant tension therefore exists among modern Druids as they draw upon and celebrate ideas of history, while also criticising the mainstream. Implicit and explicit criticisms of mainstream society are noticeable among all Druids of the open school I have come into contact with.

The concerns of Stephanie Carr-Gomm are focused within a concern for the scientific manipulation of nature; we don't want genetically engineered food or mega-ton bombs'. James Perfect spoke to me of the immaturity of politicians, and the need for each person to take responsibility for their own actions: 'People get elected to government and they're in government for five years, maybe ten years and they use that time to take what they need... it's a short-term attitude'. James also spoke of the ways in which nature is understood as animate and feminine, and of 'the landscape as an entity in itself'. Like many other initiates familiar with the *Gwersu* and other New Age texts, Raven understands the femininity of nature to exist in both reality and imagination: 'I connected with the whole spirit of the land. Rhiannon

[a Welsh horse Goddess] came to me in dream' (pers comm. 1999). While *Gwers* 11 encourages initiates to give money to Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, Arthur Pendragon's Druidry is, of course politically confrontational, using direct protest as a means of challenging mainstream concerns and asserting the Druidic self.

I am of the land... so I fight for political causes as well. And when I'm fighting at Stonehenge - and it is a battle field as I see it - it's one that is fought in different ways [through] non-violent direct-action, much the same as the protest movement, but also political manoeuvres through courts and stuff like this (pers comm. Uffington 1999)

The Druid at play (like Luhrmann's research among modern-day urban witches 1992) is the Druid who stands cognitively opposed to the realities of time and space as they are linearly understood in the physical world. The Druid's sacred boundaries created and re-inforced by Beating the Bounds, casting the circle, and standing in front of a burning effigy of a Wicker Man, assist the initiate in re-defining space and time as concepts that are mutable - where neither the past nor the present exist - thereby permitting a sense of history to unite with the intention of the rite. The Druids' sacred circles also permit the past to be owned, re-constructed, and for mainstream aesthetics to be questioned. Hence, the circle is a sacred stage for the political to be poetically invoked in the guise of the Earth deity.

In *Revolution and Re-creation* (2000), Gordon McDougal discusses the relationships between theatre and poetical expressions serving as forms of social evolution through revolutionary meaning. The true effects of such theatrical revolutions, suggests McDougal, work upon the audience to inspire new forms of thinking that contradict mainstream social concerns.

Poetry, like revolution, is anarchic in character because it encourages imaginative and compassionate forces that are continually in opposition to the forces of social order. Plato thought theatre anti-social because the audience sympathised with Oedipus when social order demanded his expulsion... Theatre, like revolution, must continually find new forms for its anarchic purposes. Its function is to re-form; through play, to re-create (ibid: 128).

The audience become the players as they are influenced by the political currents within the set. While pertaining to the premise that all actions and thoughts are political, McDougal fails to separate the explicit act from the implied. When discussing the OBOD, we have to realise that while individuals may present themselves as left wing, Green, anarchist, or even claim to be a-political, the Druidry of the OBOD allows only political sub-currents to flow through their teachings, that are presented as three-dimensional forms of poetry - or in this instance, pilgrimage as a socio-religious performance. Hence any conscious re-evaluation of social order is transformed into an implicit act. Political meanings are certainly expressed outside of the ceremonial circle, yet they are paradoxically negated in favour of the poetic form and content of their sacred plays.

For example, while the Wicker Man is a symbol of the Druidic appropriation of the past and therefore an empowerment of the Druidic self in the present, the politics and power of the act are negated in favour of the aesthetic. Although the ritual gains symbolic power and meaning in the 'liminal', the initiate and the group lose all power in 'the mundane'. The relationship between the initiate and the spirit of the Order grows through links forged in ceremony, while the denial of political symbolism is a denial of one's own power. Furthermore, this ceremonial denial is a silent acceptance of domination from social forces external to the Druids' ritual circle. Druids such as Jen propose that the historical past and the sacred space of the present blur any distinction between the two, while the mundane is understood as a space where political belief may be expressed. The two realms of the sacred and mundane remain, for the Druid, separate through denial.

Throughout my research it was sometimes difficult for me, as an initiate of the OBOD, to make such a critique of the Order that I still feel, in some way, connected to through initiation and my history of ritual involvement. Although this essay is a critique of political denial, and the socio-ritual meaning of pilgrimage, it is certainly worth mentioning the colour involved in, and the satisfaction of, participating in 'liminal' events 'outside' of the 'mundane'. These included a performance of Vortigen's Tower, a Welsh folk-tale from the *Mabinogii*, and numerous interviews with initiates of all grades and standing within OBOD. At times, I wanted to simply relax into the scene before me as a Druid, and a headache that plagued my enjoyment of the Lughnasadh and the Wicker Man ceremonies did not lift until I 'let go' of my own anthropological considerations - allowing myself the privilege of temporarily denying my politically focused analysis. Freeing myself from this 'etic' frame of thinking, I discovered that I was able to enter, more fully, into the rhythms of this pilgrimage as I danced to the beat of the drums and joined in the chanting to the Wicker Man.

The next day the camp prepared to return home, renewed by the experience of nature as deity. I remained fully aware of the political nature of the Druid's spiritual pilgrimages, although I was not able to properly analyse these ceremonies until I returned home to Durham. This brief moment was, perhaps, the only time throughout my research that I properly 'let go' and properly participated without trying to observe.

Chapter 7. Pilgrimage to Iona: contesting Christianity.

Iona's reputation as a Celtic Christian pilgrimage site is well documented by theologians and historians. St. Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* (probably 7th century) tells of St. Columba's journey from Ireland to this tiny island in the Inner Hebrides that today, inspires Christians the world over to make pilgrimage. Shirley Toulson suggests Columba and his crew landed on the Mull of Kintyre around 561, taking two years to travel the 160 miles to Iona (1995: 42-3). History and myth place their arrival on Iona's Bay of Columba, located on the southern part of the island, around 563 AD. Iona's claim as Columba's preferred site to disembark lends credence and prestige to the island. However, both tales emphasise Scotland as the stepping stone for Christianity's entrance into England.

In the early 18th century, William Sacheverell wrote of the 'miraculous' journey of St. Oran into the Otherworld from Iona as a sacrificial victim of Columba, therefore stressing the sacred nature of the island and its proximity to the hidden realms of the esoteric:

Columbus dream'd that a Famine (afflicting the Northern parts of Britain) would never cease unless he buried a Man alive... Amongst these one Oran offer'd Columbus to be the Man, provided he would build a Chappel to be called by his Name; Columbus assented, and built the Chapel, and put the Man standing upright into a Grave, with a promise it should be open'd again at the end of 24 hours; which was done accordingly, and Oran still living began to entertain Columbus, and his Company, with so particular an Account of the State of the Dead, that the good Man did not think it safe, to trust him any longer among the Living, but order'd the Grave to be closed again upon him, and sent him to the other World, where he had already made so good an acquaintance (Sacheverell 1702: 134).

For the pilgrim, Iona emerges as a place located between the idea of the miraculous world of death, and the mundanity of life. Similarly for Druids, Iona transforms, through selected myth and history, as an island with an identity beyond Oran's experience of life and death. According to St. Adomnán, Columba's biographer, the Inner Hebrides had Druidic associations around the time of Columba's arrival, and Adomnán did his best to dismiss these Hebridean residents as kidnappers or evil magicians (see Adomnán 1895). Historians have since addressed such biased writings, with Marian McNeill (1951) noting that 'Iona was a sacred isle of Druids' before Columba's time', and how 'St. Patrick, St. Columba and other Celtic saints had little or nothing to say of the faith it was their mission to supersede' (ibid: 8-10). Lucy Menzies concurs that despite Danish and Viking invasions in the late 8th and early 9th centuries AD, Columban Christianity had 'accomplished what its founder had intended; it had shown the people of Britain the better way of Christianity as against Pagan superstition and belief' (Menzies 1992: 211). And yet, more recently, Iona has proved an interesting 'lure' for modern-day Druids.

Ross Nichols, the founding member of OBOD, certainly visited Iona, using the island as a place of retreat, while the supplementary *Gwers* Iona of the Bardic Grade, written by Nichols, contains a poem by Columba detailing the island's spiritual magnetism. In *Gwers* 10 of the same grade, Columba is referred to in his reincarnated form of Muiredach, a 9th Century Abbott of the Monastery of Monasterboice, Co Louth, Ireland.¹¹ The emphasis on Columba and other people as sacred beings are always linked, in some way, to the natural landscape as a spiritual container that is simply responded to by these characters, this being the focus of Druidic pilgrimages to this place. In the same *Gwers*, the spiritual magnetism of the island is, again, referred to in relation to the Saint and his Celtic (or Irish) spirituality. The same nature is respected by modern Druids, and hence this supplementary *Gwers* acknowledges Columba (and therefore Celtic Christianity) within the context of nature. Columba becomes an important link for Druids today as he is cited as one of the few identifiable mediators who once existed between Christianity and the pre-Christian Ireland:

According to Irish tradition, he (Columba) retained throughout his life the love he acquired for the old poetic tales of his race and, himself a poet, probably became a member of the Order of Bards (McNeill 1951: 18).

In this way, Columba mirrors the King Arthur of the Dark Ages, as Arthur also symbolises a historic link with a fading Pagan culture around the time of the coming of Christianity.

In 1989 the Order of Bards Ovates and Druids returned to Iona, and for two weeks every May the island is re-claimed as '*Innis-nam-Druidneach*' - the Isle of the Druids (ibid: 9). My research re-traced an identical journey I had made over 10 years ago as a young initiate of OBOD, attending the first pilgrimage to Iona's only village, Baile Mór. This chapter documents my return to this place, a mecca for many Christian pilgrims, and in the process makes a comparative study of the ways in which Iona is implicitly claimed as a focus of Pagan spirituality for members of the OBOD. The chapter also notes the ways in which the OBOD's ritual emphasis has switched from focusing upon the Columban history and myth, toward a non-Christian spirituality emplaced within Iona's natural landscape.

Remembering the past.

After a spectacular journey from Glasgow through the beautiful mountain passes, lochs and glens of the highlands, the train pulled into Oban. Stepping out from the train station I faced the harbour, a scene familiar to me from my first visit as a young initiate of the OBOD in 1989. Looking out across the circular quay I recalled my first visit as an initiate - a still night and the sea mist gently rolling into the harbour, gulls flying in and out of the fog bank. A pleasant feeling of nostalgia filled me. Finding my

¹¹ The name comes from the Irish Gaelic *muiredach* 'lord, master', or 'sea-lord'.
<http://www.crosswinds.net/~daire/names/celtirishmale.html>
Also <http://www.keeling.force9.co.uk/archive.html>

hotel, I settled into my room overlooking the harbour and set off to re-familiarise myself with the array of shops, restaurants and fishing boats lining the quay-side.

Oban, a city of 8,500 residents (www.oban.org.uk/firstimp) gains status as a city due to the presence of two Cathedrals. The Roman Catholic Cathedral of St. Columba presiding over the trawlers returning from sea - a modern building situated between the many hotels overlooking the water. Inside the Cathedral are visual references to Scottish Christianity. The alter, draped in a white cloth, bears a Gaelic inscription woven into its fabric; *Cha Bhith Dith Orra San A Shireas an Tighearna*, 'There Will Be No Want On Those Who Seek the Lord'.¹² Draped in a cream cloth around the pew and depicted in red and surrounded by a deep purple Celtic knotwork, are represented the four saints from the gospels of Kells.

A few candles were burning - prayers left by concerned believers - and a solitary woman sat transfixed in dark prayer with her God. Turning to leave, I encountered a large painting hung above the dimly lit annex. Straining to focus in the dimly lit Cathedral, I could just make-out the figure of a white-clad monk accompanied by six attendants in a boat. This was clearly a depiction of Columba's exile from Ireland, as well as a portrait of his past involvement with, and subsequent rejection of, the Bardic arts. After exile, Columba and his followers headed for the Hebrides to spread the Word of Jesus Christ, depicted in the painting by a white dove blessing the hazardous journey before them. This iconography is a clear indication of how modern-day Christianity shares in the Celtic-Christian history of 'leaving behind' the old Pagan religion of Druidry - the picture mirroring, and perhaps directing, pilgrims passing through Oban on their route to Iona (see also Coleman and Elsner 1994).

This metaphor of religious appropriation (Columba's denial of Irish Paganism, and the subsequent Christian appropriation of the Pagan Hebrides) seemed to mirror the activities of Druids visiting this part of Britain in order to re-assert their own sense of self in this shared landscape. The artwork on the pew embodied the roots of pre-Romanised Christianity, the Gaelic writing on the altar containing the memory of an indigenous tradition - ironically displayed within a Roman Catholic Cathedral. Scottish language, its cultural affiliation with Irish missionaries, and artwork rooted in a pre-Christian past, have all been appropriated into the greater collective of the Catholic Church. It was this sense of history that first prompted George MacLeod to build an inter-denominational Christian Community at Iona's Abbey, of which I had heard so much so much of in England (see Ferguson 1998 and Shanks 1999).

¹² Translation kindly provided by Professor Cathair O Dochartaigh, Department of Celtic / Roinn na Ceiltis, University of Glasgow.

Today, the Abbey community is a focus for pilgrims to experience the spirituality associated with the island. It is a place where residents of the now ecumenical community 'are empowered to recognise the Holy Spirit at work within [their] own lives' (Shanks 1999: 8). My brief experience of this 'Ionian experience' came during a three day stay at the Abbey prior to joining the Druid group in the local Iona hotel. A stay at Iona's Christian 'community' permits one to attend voluntary events such as a pilgrimage across Iona, Bible readings, services and meditations held in the Abbey. All of these ritual events refer to Jesus Christ at work in peoples' everyday lives and serve to unite an extant Christianity supported by a Celtic past that is, like the spiritual ideals of modern Druidry, emplaced within the landscape of Iona.

At the Abbey, John, a resident volunteer, informed me that the weekly pilgrimage had already set off from St. Martin's Cross half an hour ago, and offered me a lift in his blue transit van to the pilgrimage's half-way point. John and I set off for the rendezvous point known locally as the *Machair*, a local term for an open sandy lowland plain, now home to the islands only golf course. After a half an hour wait, a group of around 50 exhausted white, and African and Jamaican Methodists tramped slowly over the brow of the rocky hill led by a lively mob of children (appendix 7). In defiance of their tiredness (the group had just walked the rocky path from the St. Columba's Bay on the South side of the island), they all sang their praises to the Lord. It was, indeed, an unexpected and colourful sight. Resting amid the sandy dunes of the *Machair*, the group consumed the tea and sandwiches made by John, preparing for the final stage of their journey to the Hermit's Cell, an archaeological monument on the island familiar to me from past visits with the Druid group in the 1980s.

As I mixed with the mostly Afro-Caribbean-Londoners, Robert approached, me introducing himself as a past student of Social Anthropology at a London university, insisting I interview him at a later date. As the group set-off, many asked about my research and told me of their feelings for the love of Iona, and of the presence of God in the flora and fauna present around us. Feeling accepted into the group, I agreed to meet Robert in the Iona bar the next evening, after the conclusion of a short service in the Abbey. The service turned out to be quite unusual, culminating in around 30 black Methodists all dancing around the abbey as they sang their 'Praise to the Lord'.

Throughout the interview, Robert worked, very determinedly, to un-pick everything he had experienced with the Tottenham pilgrimage group. On reflection, Robert's responses seemed a lesson in disbelief amid a group of devout believers, and were certainly not representative of the group. Nevertheless, Robert's comments are worth bearing in mind as they represent the diversity of beliefs to be found within such groups. Throughout the interview, Robert seemed angry that he had not experienced any miracles and, subsequently, he seemed to be losing his faith.

Robert. Iona is just another landscape. Columba landed sometime in the 6th century - oh yes, I have seen many places where people have been longer than that. It didn't make any impact on me, except to see the beauty of God's creation. The sea, it bashes the rocks and pebbles on the sea shore. What does

this necessarily mean? To me, it does not mean anything. It is just nature. What does it mean? ... I didn't see anything Christian. I didn't see Christ, I didn't see Columba.

PD. Many people here say that Iona is different because the spiritual realms are closer to the physical world than they are in other places. How do you feel about that?

R. When you are alone on a desert island, you are bound to have hallucinations. These hallucinations can easily occur if you are isolated for a long time, but here, here on Iona, they happen to be other people on the same desert island, so it comes easier to believe. But I suppose if you are an individual on your own desert island, away in the middle of the sea alone, you would seriously think you are an angel or something, or that you are reaching God... I am not completely saying that it is rubbish because it is important.

I began to wonder why Robert had agreed to come to Iona in the first place and why, in the Abbey, he seemed to be joining in the ritual celebrations of the staunchly Christian group.

PD. Last night when you were in the church, and we were dancing and singing, you did seem to be expressing your faith with others.

R. I expressed myself, but it wasn't my faith. I enjoyed the music and the reading... It was a social event, an occasion when people were asked to participate. You have to participate in the ritual to appease them. In the process, you may enjoy it. It was a free dance, a free expression.

Later the same day I interviewed Sue, a white Methodist minister and joint organiser of the pilgrimage, discovering a belief more in keeping with mainstream Christian tradition.

PD. In what ways are places such as St. Columba's Bay and the Hermit's Cell sacred?

Sue. I think the symbolic is the word I would use. Whether they are historic in the sense that they are the places where things happened - who knows? The bay [St. Columba's Bay] was symbolic of the struggle of Columba and his journey, but also symbolic of something of ourselves in these stones... And the Hermit's Cell as well. We don't know whether it was a Hermit's Cell - it might have been a sheep pen - but you get a sense, by being there, of the fact that it's a place of peace, and a place of light. Even if it were a sheep pen, it could have been a place like that where hermits would once have visited when people wished to be by themselves. So, the cell reminds us [the pilgrims] of the importance of space.

The importance of space, and the accompanying sense of peace, seemed important to various Christians I spoke with, rather than the island's associations with historical characters. For example, Columba's place on Iona remains safely cocooned in myth and history, serving only as a beacon to notify people

of Iona as a place available for pilgrims to contemplate life and express their faith. The true spiritual experience for most of the pilgrims I spoke with lay in the geography and general nature of Iona. History serves as ideas that feed into the present with easily transferable metaphors. For example, Columba lived in a rural community with other people, and pilgrims visiting Iona also live together as one collective. This is understood by Sue as a spiritual lesson to be carried back into city life: '[W]e need to be reminded that God is there in the rubbish, and in the tower blocks, as much as in the hillsides and the countryside... the style of worship and liturgy that is something that I would personally like to see evolve and develop within my own church community'.

Paul, joint organiser with Sue, informed me of how he likes to experience Iona (this is Paul's third visit) and then attempt to find Iona in London. 'Iona puts me in touch with the God I can meet in life. In life's joys and delights - and all the rest of it. Iona would be no good for me if I couldn't translate some of it to the city where I work - to the people I work with'. During group Bible reading classes, the wishes of Paul and Sue for their experience of Iona to be projected upon more homely landscapes also seemed to be mirrored by other pilgrims. Biblical myths are understood by contextualising stories of compassion into lessons relevant for people today (Jesus Christ feeding drinking water to a woman at a well near Canan, and Jesus contesting the Jewish law by working on a Sabbath or talking to prostitutes).

The Druids' pilgrimage.

After my three days with the Methodists had ended, I relocated my studies away from the Iona Community toward the hotel in the village, and the retreat of the Order of Bards Ovates and Druids. I booked into my room overlooking the Sound of Mull, ordered a pot of tea, and sat in the familiar surroundings of the sun lounge watching the sea gulls hovering over the ferry taking the Londoners away, and bringing new tourists and pilgrims toward the island. In this brief moment between groups of Christian and Pagan pilgrims I realised that, as an anthropologist, I am not truly a part of any group - rather, I am a mere onlooker. Only here the hotel sun lounge, studying what is surely one of the most beautiful views in the world, do I feel truly alone. In this moment, Iona seemed to me a complex and beautiful place full of religious contradiction and surprise.

As I sat enjoying the view over St. Ronan's Bay the first Druid from the OBOD group arrived, settled on the lawn in front of the hotel and relaxed with the view before her. I went outside to introduce myself. Serina seemed happy to meet another Druid and openly spoke of her joy as a pilgrim visiting for the third time. The true Iona, Serina explained, exists on a spiritual plane somewhere above and beyond the physical space of the island. The closeness of this spiritual realm to this physical Iona makes the island a sacred place. Serina explained why her favourite place on the island was the highest point named *Dun I* (appendix 7) where she felt a true sense of her own self upon its peak;

Serina. 'I climbed *Dun I*. I laughed, I cried, and then something within me says "this is me"'.

PD. How does Iona 'become you'?

S. 'I don't know. It happens on another level'.

The imaginative sense of 'being *Dun I*' suggests a feeling prevalent among Druids that the body is, through meditative contemplation, intimately bound within local landscapes that, through their ritual use over the centuries, exist beyond and between the mundane and sacred. At the OBOD's Uffington retreat, held in the Summer of the same year, Brigit, an initiate of the Druid Grade, informed me how the landscape, as a living Goddess, contains memories that Brigit is drawn and attunes to. These memories are shared with Brigit through natural features of the Goddess such as stones, water or the actual voice of the Spirit herself as She speaks to Brigit. Brigit suffers ME, and her symptoms include, among others, disorientation, accompanied by great sense of loss that is mirrored within her inner-landscapes experienced in meditation.

With my ME, it feels as if I am totally lost, upside down, and completely disorientated so that nothing makes sense. My whole bodily orientation isn't right, which causes physical symptoms. Working with these symptoms [in meditation] to make sense of them, my body seems to feel more ordered.

Andrew, an initiate of the Ovate grade and university graduate from Manchester, also described to me the landscape around Uffington as a remembering entity with a sense of identity intimately bound within his own cognitive processes. 'I don't think I could separate out which influences were the landscape, and which were me personally... we are a reflection of the landscape itself'. At the same camp, King Arthur Pendragon stated in an interview, 'I am of the land'. For these Druids, a sense of identity is required, owing to their minority status (and relative invisibility) in society. As pilgrims form their identity through imaginative processes linked with ritualised attunement such as meditation and the expression of these beliefs through pilgrimage, corridors of communication are formed between the initiate and the landscape which they perceive as a living and remembering being. Once 'opened' through ritual behaviour, these corridors may be understood as a bridge between the individual's need to affirm belief, and the individual or group expression of them. The experiences of Serina, Brigit, Andrew and Arthur all utilise the imagination, and also provide the impetus for pilgrimage - a physical journey toward, and into, a landscape that permit Druids to express their beliefs, and therefore reinforce the sense that the corridors of communication between the human and supernatural remain open.

The expression of culture, through the ritualised thoughts and behaviour of Druid pilgrims, leaves much to be considered, firstly in terms of anthropological analysis, along with the ways in which Druids today understand their constructed theology. For example, many Druids consider the landscape to be a living deity, yet many fail to consider the ways in which She is alive, thinks or remembers. However, it seems evident that, without pilgrimage, only a vague sense of self-identity exists, while pilgrimage serves as a dynamic expression of nebulous ideas of language, song, or the economy of

prayer and symbolic sacrifice (see the Wicker Man ceremony in chapter six). Hence for the initiate, pilgrimage permits a sense of culture to emerge as a coherent (and implied) assertion over place. As a mainstream religion, Christianity is accepted as a cultural group by mainstream society. Thus Christians do not focus upon singular phenomenon such as pilgrimage in order to fully express their own sense of being in the world. Written in text, Christianity's 2000-year-old history guarantees it an accepted place in society. For the Druid, one's social reality has to be considered and asserted - this assertion takes the form of the OBOD's retreats to places such as Iona and Avebury, or COBDO's pilgrimages of protest. These expressions of culture are carefully considered within the texts of New Age-Pagan literature, understood as arenas where beliefs are confirmed, while activities such as improvised rites, ceremonies and meditative exercises create a sense of inspired fluidity within the framework of textual beliefs.

Each OBOD pilgrimage is formally 'opened' using the basic ritual circle familiar to New Age Paganism (appendix 3). During my first visits to the Iona Hotel as a young initiate in 1989 and 1990, a group of around 30 initiates sat in the North lounge as Philip Carr-Gomm chose one person to ritually cast a circle around the participants and the room. Peace and love was offered to the four spirits of the quarters and the Celtic saints were invoked. Philip chose two initiates to cast and consecrate the circle with the blessed elements of fire and water using incense and a wooden dish of spring water. After the solemn blessing was completed, the intent of the ritual was formally declared by Philip to the invoked spirit of the place (the living spirit of Iona and the collective spirit of the group). Philip then led the group briefly into a deeper meditation - contemplation being a useful tool to consciously access the imagination.

On this occasion, the basic ritual framework remained, although the whole procedure seemed to me less formalised. Cairis (pronounced Carish) had also been present along with Philip on my first two retreats, and on this occasion assisted Philip in casting and consecrating the circle. In 1989, everyone present (including Philip) expected the unexpected, and this sense of expectation seemed to reflect an air of uncertainty amid the excitement of these first retreats of the Order. At least half of the 12 initiates present had attended one of the Order's previous Iona retreats (or the Iona experience as it was now called). Cairis was now *Modron* (Grove Mother of the Order), reflecting her own experience and confidence, utilising her newly found authority as she led the opening ritual (as well as many subsequent ceremonies and meditations over the course of the week). In a later interview, Philip informed me that the amount of ceremony performed during a retreat depended upon how they both felt concerning of the group. Most of the rituals performed by Cairis and Philip involved humour, laughing and joking as they carried out their ritual duties. Permitted by their ritual relationship developed over a period of 12 years, the familiarity between the two was quite evident, creating a relaxed atmosphere in which the ritual circles are now constructed.

As the initiates concentrated upon the sacred depths created by this newly constructed sacred space, Cairis led the group through a brief meditation. After the meditation, each pilgrim spoke of their own

journeys. Serina, had travelled from Amsterdam, stating she was a healer and co-ordinator of the Ovate grade. The 18 year old Serina, a German and harpist, was the youngest of the group. Kerry owned an art gallery and had also travelled with Serina from another part of Germany. Lance, a New Age author, had travelled from California, while George, a New Zealand fisherman, had come to Iona as a part of his Grand Tour. The other six members of the group were from England: Cairis the *Modron* of the Order from Lancashire; Philip the chief from Richmond; Jeff a civil servant from London; Jim a builder and Elizabeth a museum curator from Northumberland. Finally, the most senior member, Josh from Worcestershire, completed the group.

Philip and Cairis addressed the group, reiterating the OBOD's Iona *Gwers* (edited by Philip), speaking of the sacredness of Iona, and pilgrimage to Her as a journey returning into the heart of the living landscape. The island, Philip explained, has a spirit and a history that contributes to a sense of the island as a sacred and living deity. Drawing upon syncretic myth, Philip also spoke of an Irish folk-story, Finn mac Coul (or Fionn mac Cumhaill), telling the story of the salmon of wisdom (see Squire 1975 and Graves 1988). Later in the week, the group dined on fresh sea Salmon from the waters around Iona while Philip referred, once again, to the story of Finn. The poetic links between the mythical Irish Salmon of wisdom and the meal we were about to consume were not lost upon the group, and served to create a sense of sacredness throughout the meal.

These links between Scotland and Iona reinforce the Christian link between Columba and his arrival upon Iona from Ireland, while the symbolic story of the Salmon allows the island's history to be connected with a non-Christian spirituality. Connections between Irish folklore and modern Druids present on Iona are tentative to say the least, yet the emotional connection felt by initiates with mythic-history, permits the idea of culture to emerge from the tension that lies between the idea of a pre-Christian identity, and the group's need to create a sense of culture in the present. The Salmon on the table serves as an example of this imaginative process of asserting culture, and supports ideas of Druids being linked with worldly wisdom familiar in ritual Pagan art (appendices 7 and 8). By eating the Salmon prepared with a healthy serving of myth, the meal is sacralised (spiritualised, if you like, with the wisdom contained within the myth), culture is properly considered and expressed, and Druidic culture becomes a reality. In this instance, the Salmon serves to feed the hungry needs of an unexpressed identity. The salmon becomes a metaphor for culture, emerging from the space between idea (Irish myth) and need (self-assertion in a social reality).

The landscape itself becomes a container for the emotional response of the initiate to the idea of identity, and the stage upon which culture is performed. The salmon is a three-dimensional representation of the script, rehearsed by the initiates from the *Gwers*, and contained as one part (or scene) within the greater performance of the pilgrimage. The presence of the non-initiated upon Iona assists in distinguishing those who know from those who do not, and, unknowingly, the non-initiated become passive bystanders through whom Druids measure and know themselves as different, as present, and as a cultural reality existing, secretly, within society. As much as culture is determined by

what initiates know, and by the ways in which ritual knowledge is expressed, the Druidic 'I' or 'self' is also known by measuring one's sense of self against the ignorance of other people. Druids of the OBOD are Druids, simply because the idea of Druidry remains unknown, un-expressed by other people. The uninitiated have no emotional response to the unknown beliefs and experiences of the Druid, and the ignorance of this passive audience is a determining factor convincing Druids that they are, indeed, real. In truth, as long as the initiate is aware of the ignorance of others, the audience need not be physically present in order for the distinction between us and them to be known. The audience is certainly important, yet not physically required, and may be invisible.

This is fine for Druids, as knowing and feeling (belief) ensure that the initiate's sense of self is always maintained. And yet this ritual isolation also presents problems in communicating to the uninitiated who remain unfamiliar with their system of thinking. The public, unaware of the ways in which Druids transform mundane objects such as trees, monuments, or whole landscapes, into objects worthy of the status of spirit or deity, will (most likely) dismiss such theology as too surreal an opinion to comprehend. The OBOD's ritual secrecy, I suggest, is therefore a form of self-protection guarding against the possibility of social rejection. Hence any self-assertiveness by the OBOD in the ritual arenas, such as Iona, that are shared with contending social groups (archaeologists, Christians or other Pagan-New Age groups), remain socially and politically implied and symbolic within their ritual acts. The space between idea and expression from which culture emerges may now be considered as a purely personal response to the cultural needs of the OBOD initiate. The imaginative ways through which culture is permitted to emerge by the initiate may be considered self-empowering yet, on a political level, socially in-effective. Druidic culture remains, through its surrealisation of nature, uncommunicated to society. While recognising the failure of religious minorities such as the OBOD to communicate their cultural ideals of protecting the Earth as Goddess, this non-communication, inherent within OBOD pilgrimages, becomes a determining factor in ensuring that Druidry serves only as a poetic form of belief, while the things that Druids really care about (the perceived abuse of the nature Goddess) are not fully responded to through the dis-empowerment of their ritual silence. It seems, to me, a contradiction.

The social, and therefore the political, framework of Druidic pilgrimage resonates invisibly with society. In the case of politically focused groups such as COBDO, the resonance is overtly political, embracing, within the ritual act, political intent. For the initiate of the OBOD, to simply perform identity satisfies the inner-need for identity to be expressed, and the OBODs' pilgrimages occur in two important forms, inner, that is meditative journeys, and physical journeys that express the inner-experience - itself gained from text as a reaction against the neglect that society shows towards the Druid's living landscape. These journeys are experienced within the ritual circle, inside the hotel (for the imagination is trained to reach beyond the confines of bricks and mortar), and often determine the destination of the journeys in the physical world.

I spoke with several members after their inner-journeys were complete. Some spoke of seeing places on Iona they had visited on previous retreats, or parts of the island they felt 'drawn' toward. On the whole, it was difficult to encourage initiates to speak of such experiences that were obviously deeply intimate. In the ritual circle, some spoke of climbing to the highest point, *Dun I*, or experiencing meaningful encounters with spiritual beings upon the rocky island.

After the exercise in the hotel lounge, several people set off toward specific locations they felt drawn toward. Lance, Serina, Jim and Elizabeth felt 'called' to certain places by the spirit of the island, and responded accordingly. I set off to satisfy my curiosity for the northern part of the island, an area of the island I had not visited on previous pilgrimages. George set off for a roaming pilgrimage across a large area of Iona - in the process losing his way and covering most of it. These journeys may also be thought of as a way of mapping the unfamiliar (or a process of re-familiarisation of a place) that remain outside the domain of the mundane. This 'mapping' of Iona remained evident throughout discussions during this retreat, as past experiences and ritual friendships were spoken of. Remembering and orientating one's self on the island assisted in knowing the Druidic perception of the place, setting the foundations for the forthcoming collective pilgrimage across the island - a collective journey made to places that are also visited by Christian pilgrimages.

Arriving at the Hermit's Cell as one group, the initiates took time to meditate and talk of the beauty of this place, while others simply sheltered from the ever-present winds that blow across the island. The most sheltered place on the island seemed to be a stone enclosure beneath the *Cnoc Nam Bradhan Mor* (Big Hill of the Querns), a large granite formation known locally as the Sphinx owing to its vague similarity to the Sphinx at Giza. During an interview in the hotel, Philip described the Sphinx enclosure as 'the most peaceful place in the world'. Another initiate described the stone wall that encircled the sloping ground around the Sphinx as reflecting the peace and power of a prehistoric stone circle - an idea spoken of on two other pilgrimages I have attended as an initiate. Such throw-away comments seem important to me, as they reflect the tools of Druidic identity today - pre-Christian ideas that reach back into ideas of pre-history. The three-dimensional experiences of such imaginative thinking on a pilgrimage such as the Iona Experience tempt initiates into the deep (unknown) past, and therefore into a reality ever-present in the imagination. Initiates remain in the present, yet imagine themselves to be somehow beyond the present moment as they contemplate ideas of past in the present landscape. Amid the tranquillity of the Sphinx enclosure, the imaginative processes of meditation permit perceived gateways to open through which the self and landscape are realised as a Druidic. The time-frames of present-reality become mutable as the imagination allows all that has been experienced in the *Gwersu* to be fully known, and, through their physical presence at places such as Iona, ideas of culture to be truly realised. Again, we see that culture emerges from a personal and group need to a) realise one's identity, and b) to express this idea of self through pilgrimage. Like Philip, I too adore the peace of this place - the sounds of lapwings, cuckoos and gulls that occasionally break the windless silence of this aesthetically pleasing space.

The Sphinx and Hermit's Cell both face West toward the Atlantic Ocean, creating, perhaps, an ideal enclosure for the old monastic order to keep watch over their flocks of sheep. Any incoming vessels approaching the island from the West would have been easily spotted - something that would have been useful during the series of Viking raids upon Iona in the first decade of the millennium. The island is scattered with these 'cells', each large enough for one or two men to take shelter in. Just to the West of the Sphinx Rock, the company of Druids visited another cell. Like the Sphinx enclosure, this site is also surrounded by derelict stone walls demarcating another enclosure complete with shallow, barely visible plough marks in the acidic peat. From this area, the distant Sphinx enclosure to the East can be seen between the undulating geography - to the West, a clear view to watch over the Atlantic.

Modern folklore has developed in concern of the 9th century AD Viking raids (Harbison 1992). During my first retreat to Iona in 1989, I recall climbing *Dun I* while Philip told a story concerning a visiting pilgrim. One day, quietly meditating on the rocks above Iona's Abbey, the meditator saw, in a vision, a fleet of Viking ships attacking the island. His description of the different sails, Philip informed the group, provided clues enabling historians to identify the different tribes attacking the island. Another modern tale, also narrated by Philip, told the story of an elderly gentleman climbing to the summit of *Dun I*. Suffering a heart attack, the elderly man continued his spiritual pilgrimage by entering into the Otherworld.

On my 1999 visit, I asked Philip about these stories of the Viking attack and the elderly gentleman's physical and spiritual journey, along with ideas suggested by a former pilgrim that the Hermit's Cell served as a makeshift stone circle. Aware of my interest as an anthropologist, Philip seemed careful in choosing his words, rejecting any suggestion that these stories and ideas formed any major part of the Druid retreat. Voicing his concern that my interpretation of such stories would be outside of his intended context, Philip remained guarded when speaking with me about Druidry. Yet to me, such abstract stories do indeed refer to the layers of knowledge present within the minds of pilgrims as they experience Iona as initiates. For Druids making their first pilgrimage to Iona, the search for inner meanings projected upon landscapes mirror closely these types of experiences explained in modern myth - that Iona is a place where miraculous things occur owing to the spiritual nature of the landscape Herself. Such phenomena exist outside of mainstream thought, and reflect the alternative experiences desired by Druids as opposed to those sought by the Tottenham Christian pilgrims who seemed to seek meanings rather than miracles that they could read within the landscape or in Bible readings, and apply to their city lives. Modern myths, such as these detailed above, indicate the ways in which the imagination responds to the needs of Druids seeking to construct and express culture. While these stories are not specifically Druidic, they do serve to inspire and fuel the initiate's imagination, complementing the pilgrimage as a process of self-realisation - that their experiences relate to the esoteric rather than the mundane. A further example of the transformation of Iona from a Christian landscape into a Pagan arena where Druidic beliefs can be expressed can be clearly noticed during the pilgrimage made to the Columba's Bay, the stony beach of the Southern quarter of the island.

Our route took us over the high craggy rocks where we rested from the wind to count the seals in the distant Atlantic. Crossing several low-lying peat marshes, we eventually reached a place known locally as *Lag Odhar* (Brown Hollow). From our vantage place above the *Lag Odhar*, we rested once more to take in the beauty of the view below us. The narrow footpath upon which we stood dropped down toward a beautiful sand-grass plain below. We stood silently contemplating the wonderful sight before us. Breaking the silence, Philip quietly explained that for him, the place seemed like 'a chalice' - a container where the spirit of Iona can be truly sensed. Philip's statement seemed to be a reference to the Goddess - the bowl shape of *Lag Odhar* and the blue sea beyond its stony beach were all classic Pagan symbols of the woman in landscape, reflecting a Druidic pre-occupation with the feminine in opposition to the masculinity of Jesus Christ. At this point I must concur with Philip's understanding of this place, that Columba's Bay is certainly one of the most beautiful and peaceful sites I have ever made pilgrimage into.

Before us in the middle of the grassy plain (the whole area was around 400 meters across) rose a small hill known as the *Cnoc na Farire* (Look Out Hill) - perhaps another reference to the invading Viking forces of the 9th century AD. Beyond this hillock lay two small ports divided by deep green Caledonian Granite, smoothly moulded by the incoming waves into pools coloured with seaweed, and star fish. I watched the other initiates playing by the sea, one performing Tai Chi movements, some climbing the surrounding sandy cliffs, some meditating on the beach next to two great stone cairns said to be erected by visiting monks from Columba's time.

As Serina sat upon the boulders, watching the sea, I scrambled among the granite pools. Here, once again, I sensed my old Druid self returning. As I walked among the fish pools, the sensation of the sea washing over the rocks seemed to thrill and revive my spirit, and I felt, once again, some empathy with Druidic notions of nature as deity. Perhaps other initiates also felt the same joy in their quiet moments of contemplation in this aesthetically pleasing place. Later that evening, I tried to speak individually with the initiates about their experiences, yet conversation proved an inappropriate form with which to communicate such inner-experiences, and little was given away. Consequently, such experiences remain locked within, what I can only describe as, a sense of the pilgrim's self in communion with their achieved goal - the spirit of place. Aesthetics if you please, yet somehow it all seemed to mean so much more, as culture and self are re-stated through the imaginative experiences within the Druid's symbolic expressions of self.

Serving to re-claim Iona from Christians as a Druid pilgrimage site, the Iona retreat also reminds initiates of the OBOD that Druidry is much older than Christianity, and that Druids were well established in these Hebridean islands before Christians such as Columba arrived to begin their work of socially displacing Paganism. Glastonbury is another example of a New Age Druid pilgrimage site that is today claimed by Christians as the cradle of Christianity - thought to be around the time of Christ's crucifixion (cf. Bowman 1993). The era referred to in Glastonbury is different from the 6th century

Columban myths, yet the intent of the various Pagan groups using the site of Glastonbury is similar to the Druids of Iona - the re-appropriation of place through the act of pilgrimage.

Glastonbury.

Like Iona, the history of Glastonbury town in the Vale of Avalon, Somerset, is steeped in both myth and historical romanticism. In the early 12th century, Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote how, in Avalon, the mystical Isle of Apples, food grows without tilling, and where a single day becomes 100 years (Armitage Robertson 1926). This heavenly otherworld, wrote Monmouth, is the land where the legendary King Arthur received healing from his battle wounds. Giraldas Cambrensis (1146-1223), wrote Armitage Shanks (ibid), was the first to identify Glastonbury Abbey as the place of King Arthur's grave. In 1191, William of Malmesbury re-wrote his *On the Antiquity* of the Church at Glastonbury (originally 1125) to include Glastonbury as the place of the first Christian church to be constructed in England. Hence, this small market town became a mecca for Christian pilgrims seeking the roots of their spiritual identity, and the place where the essence of Christ, carried by Joseph in the Grail cup, first touched the soil of Pagan England.

Today, Druids understand the Arthurian story and the inner-mysticism of the Christian Grail quest as a bastardised form of Pagan mythology, and Pagans seek, through pilgrimages to Glastonbury, to reclaim the Pagan symbolisms of the Arthurian legends. The cup of the Grail, write authors such as John and Caitlin Matthews, represent the feminine Goddess in her manifestation as a healing and nurturing deity. Merlin, King Arthur's mentor, is thought to represent a wise elder revealing to his initiate, Arthur, the esoteric laws of nature and Her magical secrets (Matthews 1989, 1990 and 1997). Today, Glastonbury is understood by many New Age Pagan and Druid groups as the heart of Pagan Britain and an important place to make pilgrimage toward. While Pagan feminist thinkers consider the healing force of the Grail to be the embodiment of women's power (thereby linking this idea to the women's movement and emancipation from a male-dominated society with Paganism), other Druids relate their ideas of identity to the masculine attributes contained within the Arthurian quest - the warrior, the seeker, and the leader. Excalibur, the sword given to King Arthur by the esoteric Lady of the Lake becomes, in Druidic ceremony, a symbol of ritualised leadership, power, 'justice' and truth in the world. Attending an OBOD retreat to Glastonbury in February 1998, I experienced the Goddess-focused ritual familiar today among Pagans of the New Age.

Around the beginning of February, the thoughts of many initiates of the OBOD turn toward the festival of Imbolc (or Candlemas). According to the *Gwersu*, this festival forms the only ceremony completely dedicated to the Goddess. The annual pilgrimage to Glastonbury creates a space where the Goddess, in Her manifestation as the Irish Brigit, is honoured in ceremony. A part of this retreat is also given to acknowledging the Arthurian myths, with a pilgrimage within a pilgrimage, taking the ritual companions from the retreat's camp site into Glastonbury town itself. There is much to be written concerning the syncretic tendencies of English Druids to appropriate myths from countries such as Eire

and Wales into their system of beliefs. But here I wish to focus upon the imagined links between Druids today and the ritual methodology Druids use in order to assert their own sense of self in arenas considered to be traditionally Christian.

The 1998 camping retreat, held over three days in a farmer's field between Shepton Mallet and Glastonbury, operates in three stages. The first, like the Uffington retreat, involves arriving, and can be sub-divided into events allowing the initiate to mentally attune to the season through ceremony and other ritual forms, some of which involve initiation, walking on hot coals or communal bathing. The second stage involves focusing upon the season in a ceremony loosely based upon the ritual structure given in the *Gwersu*. Using the ritual circle and invocations to the four elements and their animal spirits, the group congregates in procession, enters the ritual space and celebrates the Goddess of the season. The final stage is more immediate, in the group's focus upon the mythology of the local area. By making a pilgrimage toward local sites, in this example Glastonbury town, the Arthurian story and the characters contained within it are celebrated as a cultural manifestation of Druidry. Various stories contained within the legends are focused upon by individuals, and implied meanings are sought within them, thereby allowing individuals to determine the collective (or personal meanings) of these stories. These implied meanings are, in some ways, similar to the Bible study classes I attended upon Iona with the Tottenham Christian group, where myth and history serve as references to the present day, although generally speaking, Druids tend to focus upon emplacing myth within a sacralised form of nature as deity, while Christian tendencies lean toward the social realm. This is especially true for the OBOD, where any socio-political meanings remain implied within ritual.

During a visit to Glastonbury Abbey, meditations were made at the grave of King Arthur, while in the Lady Chapel in the Abbey's grounds, three female and two male Druids spoke of the 'feminine pain' and anger experienced by women today. Little was said of these feelings, yet conversations back at the camp site revealed that some initiates linked their experiences of the Glastonbury visit to the feminine characters of Arthurian myths (most probably Gwenevere, and her banishment from Camelot's Court by Arthur). These experiences and post-ritual conversations intensify the resolve of some group members for more alternative ways of living in the world, especially in terms of gender relations. This theme was briefly discussed at a camp meeting after the group returned from Glastonbury, where the two camp organisers called for new ways to understand and work with the whole mythos of the Arthurian stories.

The quest for alternative gender identities in the social realms of society highlights the concern that many initiates of the OBOD feel for the ways in which society treats individuals. These social concerns, reflected within the ruins of the Abbey that refer the seeker to the Arthurian, indicate the importance of the landscape as a container for belief. The contemplations of the individual are performed in pilgrimage, discussed, and the emotional meanings of the pilgrim's experience help Druidic culture to be more fully realised. Although political and actual conflict between this Druidic ideal and the perceived injustices of the material world are carefully avoided in OBOD ceremonies, the

political implications of such phenomena remain evident in their ritualised journeys. There is a sense of tension as sexual politics are, one hand denied, and paradoxically promoted in conversation.

Since Glastonbury forms a 'multivocal and multivalent' arena of pilgrimage for all kinds of Christians and New Agers seeking to express their identity in the town (Bowman 1993: 55), conflicts inevitably arise between competing groups searching to reinforce their cultural selves. When approaching the Abbey grounds, the group of around 20 Druid pilgrims were instructed by wardens at the gates that no ritual was permitted within the walls of the Abbey. The reason, I was later informed, was due to the Abbey's grounds being consecrated, and a place where Christian ritual was still performed. The group leaders agreed to the warden's request and, in order not to offend anyone, performed discrete and silent meditation within the site. Having implicitly challenged the authority of the Church, the group progressed from the Abbey toward Glastonbury Tor, focusing upon the pre-Christian theme of Glastonbury. Sitting on the windy hill-side, the group formed a horse-shoe formation facing the setting sun to chant the Druidic Awen - the highlight of the pilgrimage. The themes encountered by many individuals while standing on the Tor were those of Dragons, and Merlin. As the sun set, we all gathered and held hands in a horse-shoe to catch the dying rays of the setting sun. I remembered the stories I had heard of Glastonbury being called the 'Glass Isle', the gateway to the Otherworld, and place of the dragons (cf. Graves 1988 p109), island in the mists of Avalon (cf. Bradley 1983). The uninitiated New Agers, hippies and tourists watched the event before them, taking photographs of the Druid's re-claiming, one more, Glastonbury as a pre-Christian site under the ritual guardianship of the OBOD.

This tension that exists within the space between the Druid's perception of self, and the vision of what they want to express in society, is addressed through the imaginative processes of ritual appropriation of place, creating a sense of a newly emerging Druidic culture. For initiates of the OBOD, this sense is both emotionally and cognitively persuasive enough for them to consider their expressions of belief as a cultural reality and a true alternative to the mainstream they seek so adamantly to contend through pilgrimage as a tool of negotiation. The implied meanings of the poetic and emotionally meaningful activities of pilgrimage that remain invisible to the bemused onlookers ensure that the OBOD's subliminal form of communication fails. The OBOD's ritual play of power empowers only the self, and remains ineffectual and politically inert in the real world.

Conclusion.

Druidic pilgrimages into landscapes considered sacred are ideological responses to theological beliefs. Journeys to places rich in Christian mythology serve to re-claim these landscapes as places that are traditionally Pagan. Prehistoric places, also appropriated by Druids through their ritual journeys, serve as ritual-theatres that assist in re-defining archaeological/tourist sites as territories of the Druid. Emerging from the tension between idea, and the expression of ideology, Druidic identity is considered through text and, through meditative and ceremonial techniques, emotionally embodied. Unable to fully express their beliefs in the largely secular world, Druids use pilgrimage as a tool for self-assertion in arenas that are also used by other groups.

The sacred journey now competes with other social groups, and this rivalry is implied in the ritual presence of initiates of the OBOD (and the BDO). For groups such as the LAWB and the collective body of COBDO, pilgrimage embraces, through non-violent protest, explicit acts of social subversion. Assisted by the media (newspaper and televised reports), these politico-religious journeys succeed in communicating with society. Often arrested by the police, and on occasions, imprisoned, initiates of the LAWB dramatically achieve their objective of self-assertion within the social realm.

Ritual journeys may also be made to places close to the initiate's home (their local landscape) in order to affirm a belief in the sacrality of nature as deity, or more distant excursions are made toward places far from the home. Using a ritual template available to many Pagans in literature available at the Pagan end of the New Age market, these journeys involve shifting the ritual arenas from the space of the literary imagination, emplacing theological ideas of nature as deity within the landscape represented by the humanised forms of deities - Ceredwen, Brigit, Gwenevere (and lesser-celebrated deities such as Merlin, Arthur). Nature is imaginatively embodied within a vision of the Goddess, and these characters are borrowed from the mythological figures of English, Welsh and Irish mythology. Hence, Druids consider themselves to be carrying on a Celtic tradition, displaced by the 1st century occupation of Rome, and later, by the domination of Christianity. For all Druid groups and individuals with an interest in modern Paganism, the availability of mythic-histories, and the theatrical performance of an imagined past, become the prime sources from which a cultural self is fully expressed. The imaginative process of Remensnyder's remembering (1995 and 1996) is transformed, through ritual journeys, into an expressed cultural reality.

Developing around this idea of the cultural self, Druid groups compete with each other as similar arenas are contested through pilgrimage. This inter-group contention is most noticeable within the English Druidic community among adherents of the open school of Druidry, and specifically among COBDO, BDO and OBOD. I believe these contentions have their roots within the ritual methodology and practices that refer to implicit or explicit politico-ritual operations. More interestingly, I have discovered, while speaking and listening to initiates present on numerous pilgrimages over a 12 year period, a belief that Celtic Paganism has, at its heart, Druids as the ritual leaders of Pagan theology.

Druids at OBOD camps spoke quietly about this belief, while Arthur Pendragon, Chair of COBDO, actively promoted his beliefs of reclaiming English sites appropriated by other New Age Pagan groups that are not ritually-affiliated to Druidry - that is, not formally initiated into a Druid group. This idea of religious authority is most noticeable at pilgrimages I have attended at Stonehenge and Avebury, where a few Druids organised and led the formal ceremonies attended by a majority of non-Druid Pagans. At one Stonehenge ceremony, there were only four Druids present (including myself) and two leading the ceremony, among a group of around 30 ritualists. At the Stonehenge Summer solstice ceremony in 2000, organised by COBDO, thousands of hippies, Pagans and New Age travellers gathered to mark the rising of the sun and the beginning of the season. The privately organised pilgrimages of the OBOD are attended by a majority of initiated companions of the group, and serve only to re-assure the ritual companions of their own cultural reality.

Located within monuments and landscapes embodied with selected histories (cf. Connerton 1989 and Hobsbawm and Ranger 1984), Druidic retreats, pilgrimages and ritual-protests (these terms become interchangeable as they merge into and around each other) permit the expression of the initiate's emotional responses to their own self-perceptions of self. Druidic culture is therefore considered as history, myth, New Age literature and contemplation, emerging as Druids enter natural or archaeological arenas. Pilgrimage becomes a template upon which culture can be constructed in the social realm. This process of cultural emergence is complemented, and seen, through negotiation with the authoritative bodies currently representing the sites that Druids consider sacred - Stonehenge being the prime example of a site attended by all Druid groups of the open school of Druidry. These negotiations occur on three levels, the first being COBDO's ritualised protests at Seahenge and Stonehenge; and the second, through seminars such the one held at the University of East Anglia. A lesser confrontational mode of communication made by Druid groups such as the OBOD and COBDO also occurs as these groups sit with EH, and police and local resident organisations at the Round Table meetings. All of these processes support the Druids' ritual intentions of group assertion, while also providing arenas for different Druid and Pagan groups to assert their own form of ideological practices upon others.

Modern Druids certainly believe themselves to be a relevant cultural group within society. Supported through the imaginative processes of mythic-histories embodied through the emotionally meaningful symbolisms of thought, and creatively expressed in the beautiful surroundings of nature, the current practices of Druids certainly resound with meanings that reach beyond the artistic performance of religious identity. The needs of Druids need to be experienced and closely examined in order to be able to fully understand the processes through which identity is assumed - only then may any authoritative statements be made concerning their social reality. In short, Druidic culture exists because Druids believe it to be so. However as a cultural group with relatively few members spread thinly across England, Druids must find it difficult to find the time and resources to move from the mundane and into the sacred realms in order to express their Paganism. The problems of political contention and self-assertion are similarly difficult, requiring time and energy to organise a ceremony. This problem of

group numbers remain a problem for the growth of Druidry as a culture, and this can be seen in the relatively few initiates attracted to local Grove meetings. (Most Groves have a core membership of only a few people). The relatively few numbers of Druids involved in the processes of cultural assertion currently in progress among the EH, Police and archaeological bodies, indicates a potential for Druidry to become more widely recognised as a minority group within the social fabric of English society. While the protests of the LAWB and COBDO may serve to distance certain groups from each other, their activities may now be understood within the context of socio-religious paradigms that demand arenas currently under the social control of academics and governmental representatives be reconsidered as theatres of Paganism. In this way, Druidic pilgrimage becomes a political play of power as the perceived self is fully known, and, through the theatrical and ceremonial journeys of Druid groups, expressed within a socially meaningful perspective. Culture is simply imagined, and through the Druid's sacred pilgrimage, becomes a socio-political theatre which, due to its attempts to create a socio-religious alternative to mainstream society, is all the more interesting.

The political history of the open schools' pilgrimages (retreats and other ritual phenomena) may be traced back to the closed schools of the Welsh and Cornish nationalist groups seeking autonomy from Westminster and English Druidry. In this respect, the ritual processes of the open schools clearly mirror the structure, if not the nature-based theologies of nationalist groups. By being granted access as an academic into the inner-circles and group meetings of various Druid Orders, I have shown that Druidry today has successfully moved-on from its secretive 18th century past and, through the negotiative processes of individuals such as Arthur Pendragon, has placed itself in a position from which the social landscapes of Britain are re-considered. As ideas of politics and ritual combine in shared landscapes the next decade will, for groups such as the OBOD, BDO, COBDO seeking a cultural sense of self, be an interesting one.

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Appendices and Images.

1. Representative groups of the open school of Druidry.

The British Druid Order (BDO). Formed in 1979 by the current Chief, Philip Shallcrass (Grey Wolf) who shares the role with Emma Restall Orr (Bobcat). Membership can be acquired by simply subscribing to the BDO's magazine, *Tooth and Claw*. Philip claims 350 subscribing members, and around 2000 initiates. Interviews with Philip Shallcrass indicate the focus of this group as cultural, rather than political.

The Council of British Druid Orders (COBDO). A Druid collective once known as the Grand Council. Arthur Pendragon Chairs the Council, claiming an associate membership of 15-20000. As a collective body, the main aim of COBDO is to represent English Pagans at the Druidic temple of Stonehenge.

The Cotswold Order of Druids (COD). Formed in 1995 by Veronica after separating from the OBOD. 15 associate members, and 26 initiates. Veronica was also initiated as Arch-Druid of the Inner Circle during a Stonehenge 2000 Summer solstice ceremony and is scribe to the Druidic Iolo Morganwg Fellowship. This small group performs its own rituals, while Veronica also represents the Order at COBDO meetings.

The Berengaria Order of Druids (BOD) claims 20-30 associate members, with Sarah Rooke acting as Chief Druid. This group, instead of drawing upon textual myth and history, re-interpret not simply an imagined past, but an imagined future. Incorporating elements of science fantasy into their ceremonies, Sarah's group expressions merge the past and the future with the present and forming a unity of imagined time zones, emerges ceremonial expression. Many Druids I have spoken with are unaware of their existence, or else dismiss this group as not properly Druidic.

Glastonbury Order of Druids (GOD) was inaugurated by Rolo Maughfling, Chief Druid. He is also Merlin to the LAWB and was made Archdruid of Stonehenge and Avebury by Arthur Pendragon and the group members of COBDO.

The Loyal Arthurian War Band (LAWB) is the collective name for three groups. The first, 'The Arthurian War Band - without the word 'loyal' is a warrior Order and Claw Band is the Dragon Coven of the Loyal Arthurian War Band which is a Wiccan Order, so I'm the head of three Orders' (Pendragon pers comm. 1999). Arthur claims a membership of around 15000.

Insular Order of Druids (IOD). Dylan ap Thuinn, the Chief Druid, formed this group in 1993. In 1999, Dylan formed the Virtual Druid Order (VDO), a chat-site available on-line.

The Order of Bards Ovates and Druids (OBOD). After splitting from the Ancient Druid Order in 1964, Ross Nichols (mystical name, Nuinn) formed this group. The Chosen Chief is now Philip Carr-Gomm, who became Chief Druid after Nuinn's death in 1975. The Scribe is Stephanie Carr-Gomm, and the *Modron* (Mother of the Order), is Christine Worthington (mystical name, Carrish). The Pendragon is Bill Worthington who ritually represents the ancestral line of the Pendragon name for the group. The OBOD claims over 10,000 men and women have paid the £100 fee for the 48 Gwersu of the Bardic Grade. Figures are unavailable for the Ovate and Druid Grades.

Statistical Count of Bardic initiates of OBOD outside of Britain and Eire (March 1999).

Table 1

<u>Country.</u>	<u>Number of Bards.</u>
USA	785
Canada	86
Australia	81
New Zealand	19
Greece	5

Information kindly supplied by the Order of Bards Ovates and Druids.

2. Ethnographic studies completed 1998 - 2000 (pilgrimage, ceremony and public conference).

13th-16th February 1998. Glastonbury retreat (OBOD). For my undergraduate dissertation, *Modern-day Druids: Liminality and Syncretism*. BA Hons. in Archaeology and Social Anthropology. University of Wales, Lampeter.

27th April 1999 - 9th May 1999. Iona retreat for the celebration of Beltaine (OBOD).

23rd July 1999 - 1st August 1999. Uffington retreat for the festival of Lughnasadh (harvest) (OBOD).

12th September 1999. 1st invitation to the quarterly meetings of COBDO. (Hosted by the Berengaria Order of Druids), Froddington Arms Public House, Fratton near Portsmouth.

5th December 1999. 2nd invitation to the quarterly meetings of COBDO. (Hosted by Cotswold Order of Druids), Friends Meeting House, Cheltenham.

18th - 20th December 1999. Ceremony of Alban Arthuan (Winter solstice). Brigante Grove (OBOD) Lancashire.

5th March 2000. 3rd invitation to the quarterly meetings of COBDO. (Hosted by the Free Order of Druids), Ellerskil Village Hall near Hull.

11th March 2000. Public conference, Debating Seahenge. University of East Anglia, Norwich. Chair, Professor Peter Ucko (University College London).

18th - 19th March 2000. Ceremony of Alban Eiler (Spring equinox). The Northumberland Grove (OBOD).

16th - 18th June 2000. Millennium Celebration of Alban Heurin (Summer solstice). Stonehenge (Druids of the Inner-Circle of Stonehenge) and Avebury (LAWB).

3. The ritual structure of a Wiccan ceremony.

Hail, Guardians of the Watchtowers of the East,
Powers of Air!
We invoke you and call you,
Golden Eagle of the Dawn,
Star-seeker,
Whirlwind,
Rising Sun,
Come!
By the air that is Her breath,
Send forth your light,
Be here now!

Hail Guardians of the Watchtowers of the South,
Powers of Fire!
W invoke you and call you,
Red Lion of the noon heat,
Flaming One!
Summers warmth,
Spark of life,
Come!
By the fire that is Her spirit,
Send forth your flame,
Be here now!

Hail, Guardians of the Watchtowers of the West,
Powers of Water!
We invoke you and call you,
Serpent of the watery abyss,
Rainmaker,
Grey-robed twilight,
Evening Star!
By the waters of Her living womb,
Send forth your flow,
Be here now!

Hail, Guardians of the Watchtowers of the North,
Powers of Earth,
Cornerstone of all Power.



We invoke you and call you,
Lady of the Outer Darkness,
Black Bull of Midnight,
North Star,
Centre of the whirling sky.
Stone,
Mountain,
Fertile Field,
Come!
By the earth that is her body,
Send forth your strength,
Be here now!

The circle is cast.
We are between the worlds,
Beyond the bounds of time,
Where night and day,
Birth and death,
Joy and sorrow,
Meet as one.

(Starhawk 1979: 55-6).

4. 9th July 2000. Telephone interview with Sarah Rooke, Chief Druid of the Berengaria Order of Druids.

During a conversation at the June 2000 Summer solstice ceremony at Stonehenge, Sarah informed me that she had made contact with three Guardians of Stonehenge. The situation at Stonehenge, however, did not allow Sarah and me to fully discuss this matter. A few weeks later I telephoned Sarah to explore her ideas of guardians more fully. Sarah informed me that, along with three Guardians of Stonehenge (one male, and two female), she had recently received spiritual communications with Queen Mab, a Celtic Queen. These spirits came to Sarah during meditation. 'The guardians are', Sarah explained 'as old as time and beyond it on the astral realm. They teach you, you do not ask them questions. The Astral realm can be accessed in meditation by asking permission to enter and then being granted access into it'.

The guardians first contacted Sarah during periods of meditation, they took her into the inner-circle of the henge. Within the site, Sarah explained how she saw three free standing upright standing stones alone. One of these stones shone white with light and she somehow entered into it, receiving healing and revitalisation. The experience of the white light stone was similar to a transporter beam on Star Trek's USS Enterprise. The stone, shining with light, seemed to consist of dancing molecules. After the healing, the three guardians led Sarah back to her own body and time in the mundane world. Sarah understands this phenomenon to have occurred on both spiritual and mundane levels.

The three rings of Stonehenge, she explained, is a map of ancient Atlantis. Plato's drawing of Atlantis can be perfectly transposed upon Stonehenge and understood as a monumental memory of the past constructed around 6000 BC by the descendants of Atlantis that sank around 10000 years ago. Sarah now believes that Stonehenge is due to re-activate sometime in the new millennium, and the cut and cover tunnel planned by the department of Transport, and agreed by English Heritage (chapter 4), threatens the necessary energies of this awakening. If the energies are incorrectly balanced and not 'pristine' at the time of Stonehenge's awakening, then negative energy will enter Britain with 'disastrous consequences'. An ancient fault line will then re-open, disrupting the locality with a massive earthquake. A white guardian that once sat upon the trilithons of Stonehenge has now departed because the energies at the site at present are unfavourable to it.

In her meditation, Sarah saw the trilithons as gateways letting energy into one trilithon, and out of the next. The whole complex of this world heritage site seemed to Sarah as a great wheel turning like the cosmos. Sarah explained how Queen Mab had explained all of this to her, and then explained her theory of Stonehenge as a gateway through the science fiction series Babylon 5. In one televised episode, an alien civilisation incorrectly constructed a Stargate portal, thereby permitting disruptive energy to enter into the world. To avoid a similar phenomenon occurring at Stonehenge, Queen Mab warned Sarah that the energies at Stonehenge had to be correctly balanced.

For Sarah, Queen Mab and the three Guardians of Stonehenge are working together to warn of impending upheaval, and science fantasy provides useful templates through which future disasters can be avoided. Sarah is also in intimate communication with guardians of other places understood as sacred places of pilgrimage by Druids. The dragon of Glastonbury, explained Sarah, dislikes Pagans drumming upon the Tor, and the spirits of Avebury also dislike continuous rhythm. While one might expect Druids to be in harmony with the spirits of different places they and other Pagans journey into (this being the ritual intention of pilgrimage and ceremony at sacred sites), Sarah's communications suggest this is not the case. Not only are the activities of land developers a threat to the spirits, but also the musical expressions of Druids.

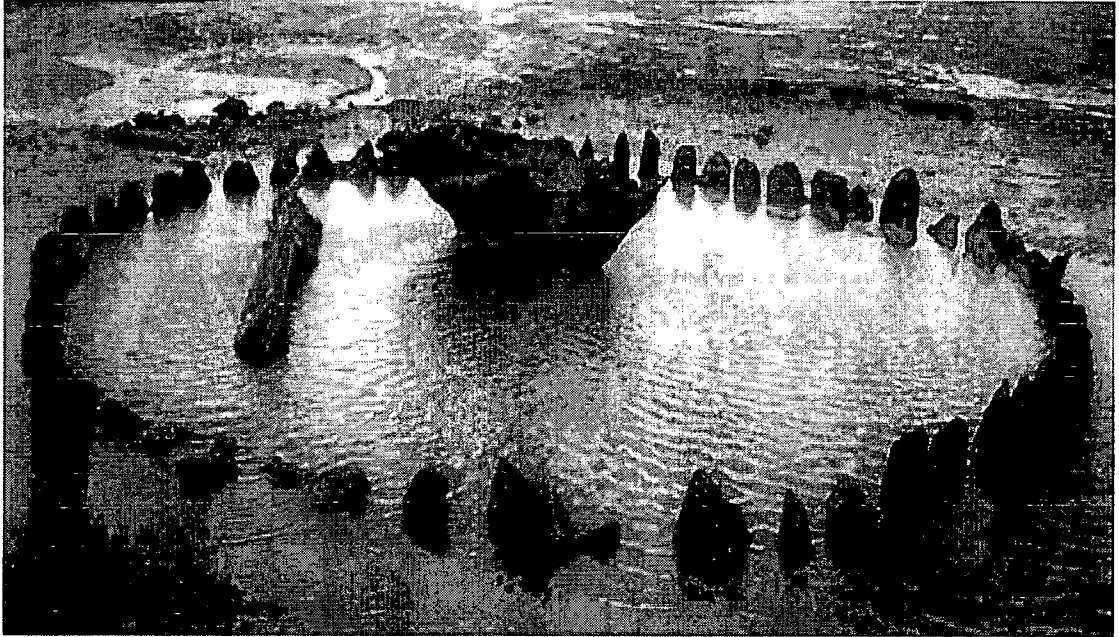
5a. Looking at this photograph as a non-initiate is a similar experience to the tourist watching the solstice event from outside of the inner-circle. The presence of an un-initiated audience permits ideas of culture to be communicated by practitioners to tourists, but does not assist the Druid's appropriative process. The pilgrims processes are, implicitly or explicitly, concerned with authoritative bodies officially responsible for the site. The ritual play of power is concerned more with ideology, and the assertion and contestation of such ideas are matters of politics.



5b. The inner-circle of Stonehenge.



6. Seahenge, North Norfolk. Prior to the excavation and removal of this monument, the timbers, along with the central 'alter', were revealed at low tide. This monument is considered special to both Pagans, Druids and archaeologists, due to its unusual position and the rarity of prehistoric wooden henges in England. Hence, archaeologists wished to preserve the timbers from further erosion caused by the sea, while Pagans and Druids considered it spiritually meaningful in situ.



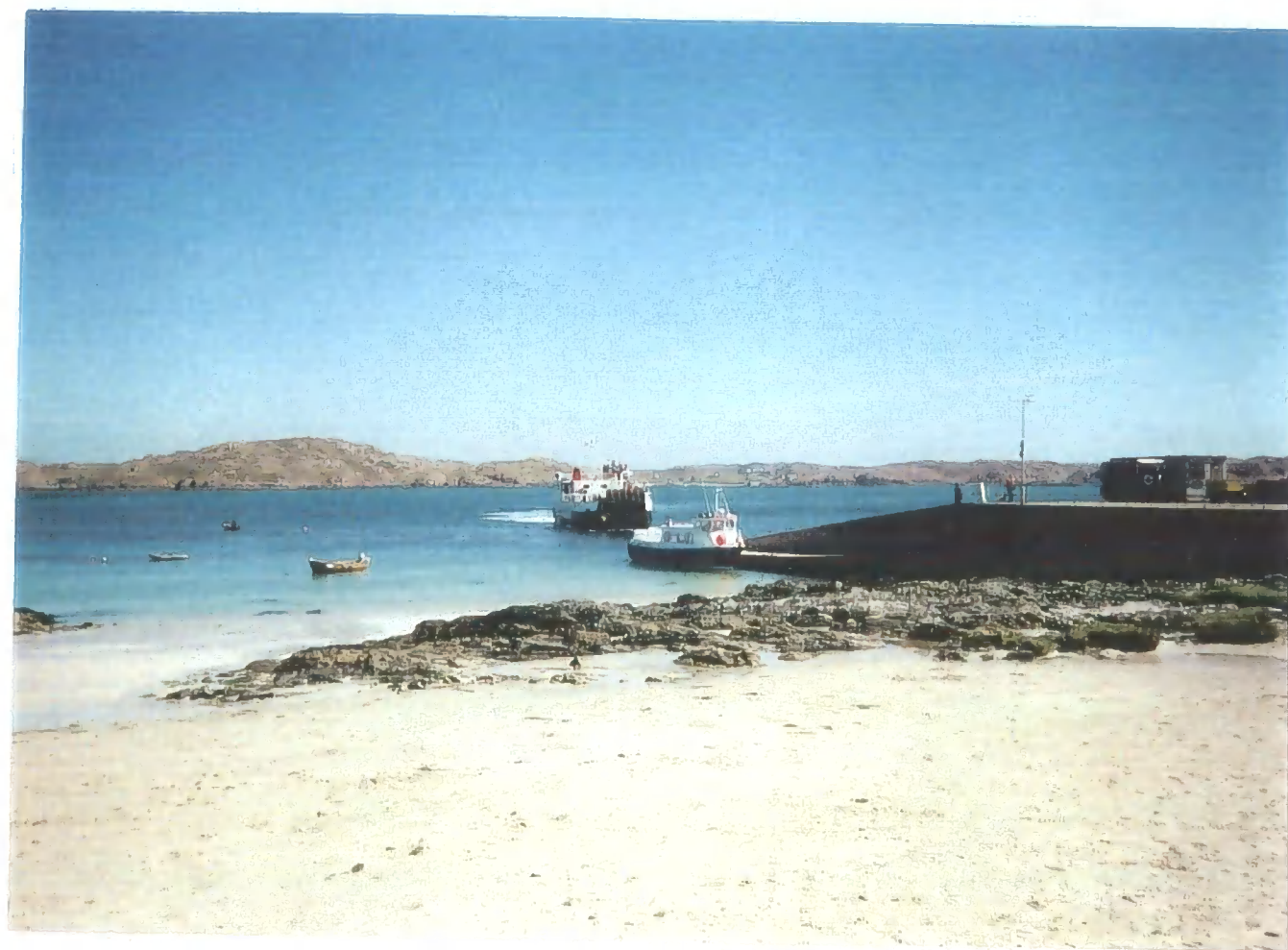
7a. Saint Martin's Cross, Baile Mor, Iona. This is the starting point for the weekly Christian pilgrimage across the island, a round-trip of 10 or so miles.



7b. Negotiating the marsh. The terrain on Iona can be rocky and steep, or very wet. Progress is always slow, with the pilgrimage lasting from around 10am to 4pm.



7c. The ferry port at Saint Ronan's Bay, *Baile Mor*, Iona. Across the Bay of Iona, the ferry port at Fionnphort, Mull is just visible.



7d. Awaiting wisdom. The final meal on the Iona retreat.



7e. A young initiate of the OBOD at the Well of Eternal youth, at the summit of *Dun I*.



8. The Salmon from the *Druid Animal Oracle* (Carr-Gomm 1996), artist, Bill Worthington 1996. These cards blend together ideas pertaining to New Age shamanic thinking with tree lore. Hence, the cards are a synthesis of Colin and Liz Murray's *Celtic Tree Oracle* (1991), and the ogham script.

